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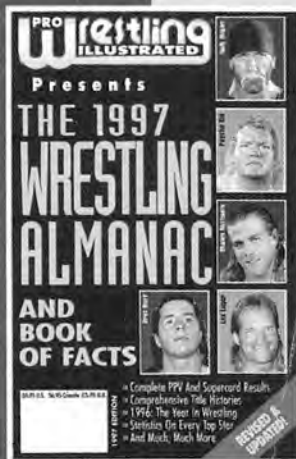
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THE MAGAZINE
THAT RIPS THE LID
OFF PRO WRESTLING

APRIL 1998

DEPARTMENTS

- 4 SINCERELY YOURS
- 6 REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK by Stu Saks
- 8 NAMES MAKIN' NEWS by Bill Apter
- 10 ON THE ROAD with Dave Lenker
- 12 BEHIND THE DRESSING ROOM DOOR by Dave Rosenbaum
- 14 THE INSIDER by Brandi Mankiewicz
- 16 ON ASSIGNMENT by Liz Hunter
- 18 CAPSULE PROFILE #265: CURT HENNIG
- 20 WHERE ARE THEY NOW?
- 22 NEWS FROM THE WRESTLING CAPITALS
- 24 MATT BROCK'S PLAIN SPEAKING
- 68 ONE ON ONE: SABLE VS. MARC MERO
- 80 INSIDE WRESTLING CLASSIC (April 1983)
- 84 OFFICIAL WRESTLING RATINGS
- 85 INSIDE WRESTLING ROLL CALL OF CHAMPIONS
- 86 BLAST FROM THE PAST



PAGE 56

FEATURES

- 26 **THE 1998 INSIDE WRESTLING COMPUTER TOURNAMENT**
Sixteen of the best wrestlers in the world have come together again—for hand-to-hand computer combat. Their strengths and weaknesses have been fed into our special program, and we present to you the results here
- 48 **SCOTT HALL EMERGES FROM HIS PRIVATE HELL**
He had to defeat Chris Jericho so he could conquer his own demons
- 52 **B.A. BILLY GUNN & JESSE JAMES' BIG BLUNDER:**
THEY'VE CREATED THE TEAM THAT WILL DESTROY THEM!
Are Bart Gunn and Jeff Jarrett angry enough to team up?
- 56 **CHRIS BENOIT'S URGENT PLEA TO WCW:**
"DON'T LET RAVEN'S FLOCK BECOME THE NEXT NWO!"
Benoit is willing to act on his own if necessary
- 60 **MARLENA:**
"ANYONE BUT LUNA!"
Mrs. Runnels discusses Goldust's bizarre antics in "Hotseat"
- 64 **SABU VS. SANDMAN:**
TABLES AND LADDERS AND CHAIRS—OH MY!
ECW's November to Remember provided at least one unforgettable match



PAGE 64

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Sincerely Yours

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PAYING RESPECT

In an era in which we read about all kinds of bad sportsmanship regarding many athletes in other sports, I'm proud that wrestling rose to the occasion when friends and foes took time to show their respect for Brian Pillman ("Memories Of Brian: The Wrestling Community Honors A Friend," February 1998).

We all knew the Harts would pay their respects to this great athlete, but to read the kind words from Steve Austin, Dustin Rhodes, Marlena, and Dory Funk Jr. made this tribute a touching one.

Pillman, despite his wild behavior and actions, was one of the

The entire wrestling world still mourns the death of Brian Pillman (shown here with Hart Foundation ally Jim Neidhart). Reader Steve Nardi was impressed by the fact that both friends and enemies alike paid tribute to him.



most exciting superstars of this era. There really wasn't any way to prepare for a match against him because he could trade technical holds, brawl, and exchange aerial moves with the best of them.

Brian Pillman may be gone, but at least the respect our sport's superstars have shown toward him and his family—despite their professional differences—lives on.

STEVE NARDI
West Berlin, NJ



Our exclusive coverage of Steve Austin's doctor visit was something reader Deanna Marie Lee loved. She thinks Austin should read the accompanying article carefully before going much further with his career.

HUMAN ASPECT

I really enjoyed the special exclusive photos of Steve Austin's visit to his physician ("Austin's Doctor Has His Doubts!" January 1998). It was interesting to see what went on during his appointment and examination. What intrigued me most was reading Dr. Torg's explanation of Austin's injuries and possible future in wrestling. After reading the description of what happened, I fear for Austin's future mobility. It seems as if Austin could be paralyzed again by one wrong move. If I were Austin, no amount of money or ego-stroking could make me get anywhere near that ring. I'd be too afraid of permanently hurting myself.

I think Austin should read that article carefully and repeatedly watch the replay of the piledriver Owen Hart gave him at SummerSlam. Maybe after a few hours of



Tommy Dreamer tries to protect Beulah McGillicutty while getting stomped on by Sabu as Doug Furnas, Phil Lafon, and Stevie Richards watch. Reader Heidi Naida thinks Dreamer should take some time off to let his injuries heal.

this, it will sink into Austin's "Stone-Cold" head that he is endangering his life by continuing to interfere in and wrestle matches.

Austin needs to stop being a tough guy and start thinking like a husband and a human with a non-athletic future.

DEANNA MARIE LEE
Bridgeport, CT

PERFECT ILLUSTRATIONS

Jason Conlan deserves some kind of an award for those hilarious illustrations of Sting outside the world of wrestling ("Life On The Outside: The Silent World Of Sting," February 1998). I thought they suited the article extremely well, and I especially liked the one with his face paint running down his head because of the rain. It's not hard to believe Sting has had so much trouble adapting to life outside the ring since he began his "black period" so long ago. Hey, many people have claimed to have been abducted by aliens, too, and those stories get printed. So why not these encounters? Leave it up to Matt Brock to bring us this in an article. Only he could get away with it.

GREG KILARNEY
Charleston, SC

NEEDS A VACATION

Tommy Dreamer doesn't need to spend 1998 in the ring—he needs to spend it healing that badly bruised foot of his ("Wrestling's Top Stars: What's Ahead For '98!" February 1998). Dreamer hurt his foot months ago, but he has yet to take off any time to let it heal. If anything, I think his schedule has increased since the injury. A few weeks ago, Beulah McGillicutty unwrapped the bandages from around his foot during one of Dreamer's interviews on ECW's TV show and I almost got sick looking at it. Dreamer needs to stop worrying about the welfare of ECW and start worrying about his own. If that foot doesn't heal soon, he won't be around to help ECW run Rob Van Dam, Sabu, and Bill Alfonso out of the promotion and back to the WWF, where they claim they belong.

HEIDI NAIDA
Connellsville, PA

EGOTISTICAL EDDY

What happened to Eddy Guerrero to make him so bitter? Did I miss something by not watching *WCW Saturday Night* or one of

(Continued on page 52)

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REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK

By Stu Saks

Back in the November 1997 edition of *Inside Wrestling*, we ran a story entitled "Nueva World Order: WCW May Have To Contend With A Unified Mexican Front." The story addressed the fact that, as talented and entertaining as they were, WCW's Luchadores were experiencing extreme difficulty getting decent rankings and top matches. The author, Dave Rosenbaum, suggested that these men might be better off pooling their talents and forcing their will on the federation: sort of a Latino New World Order.

Well, maybe they should have taken Dave's advice. Did you notice that there was only one Luchadore at Starrcade '97, the most important WCW pay-per-view of the year? Eddy Guerrero defended his cruiserweight championship against Dean Malenko, and that was it. No Juventud Guerrera. No Psicosis. No La Parka. NO REY MISTERIO JR.!

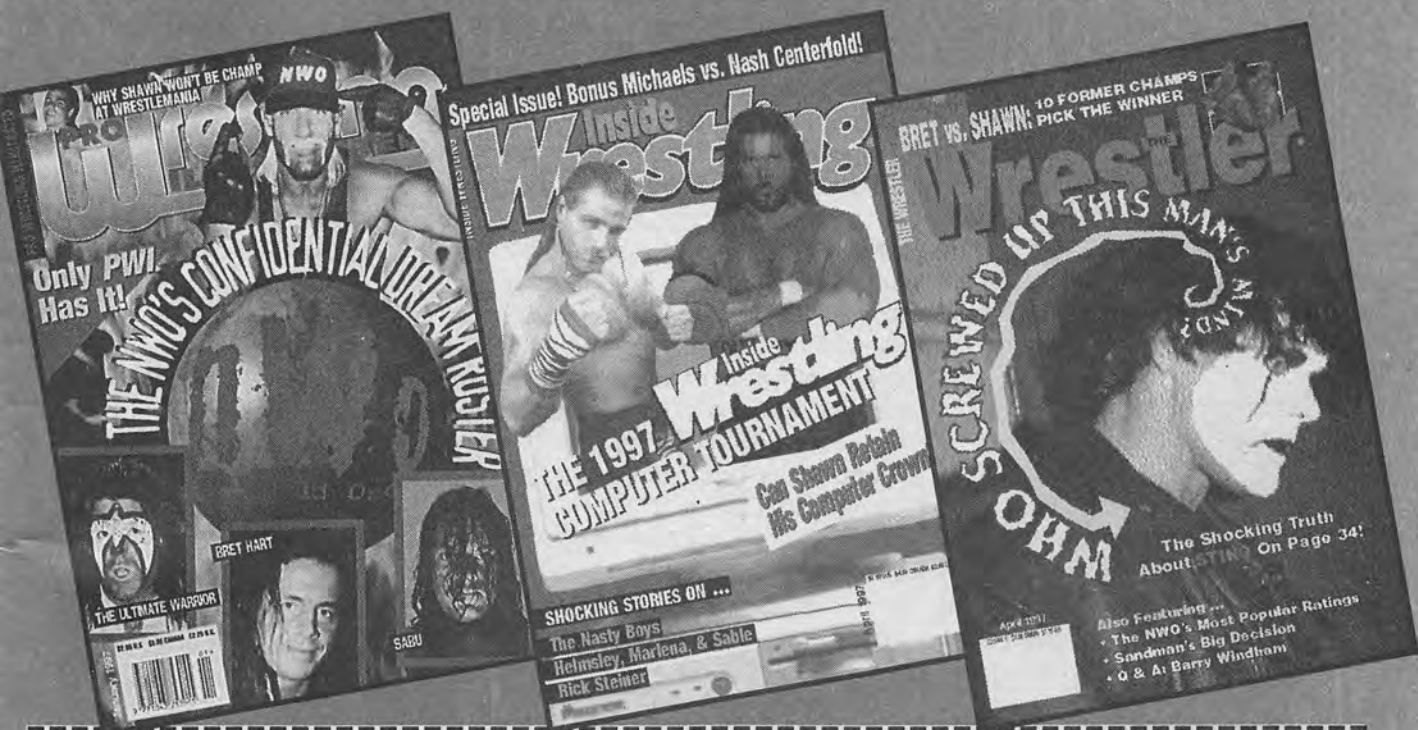
Rey, how did you feel about the snub? "I wouldn't exactly call it a snub," said the affable 140-pounder, who watched the card from the stands. "There are a lot of wrestlers in WCW and every one of them would have liked to have wrestled on the card. I know it's impossible. Still ..."

That word "still" said it all. Misterio was hurt inside, and he had every right to be. It's a similar situation to a basketball team that uses a 10-man rotation the entire year and then once the playoffs begin uses only an eight-man rotation. You have to feel for the two guys who played a role in getting the team to that point and then had to sit and watch the biggest games. The Mexican contingent, it appears, is looked upon by WCW as exciting TV filler, but it doesn't really get the respect the American wrestlers do. I don't think that has anything to do with their size—I think as fans we're beyond that barrier by now. It probably has more to do with the fact that most of the Luchadores don't speak good English and their feelings toward their opponents don't translate into PPV-selling hype.

But fair is fair—and I'm not just talking about being fair to the Luchadores. There are a lot of fans who watch WCW primarily because of the athletic beauty these men bring to the ring. One 10-minute, time-limit match would have been enough. That's not too much to ask, is it?

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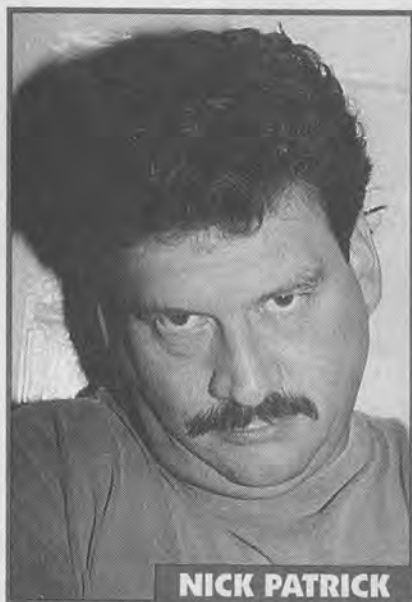
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NAMES MA

STARRCADE '97 LIVED up to all the hype. It truly was a pay-per-view to remember for WCW. For the NWO, it was largely an event to forget. Since all of you couldn't be in the dressing rooms before and after the show, I've got some items of interest that I witnessed that day:

I saw **Eric Bischoff** and **Scott Hall** whisk **Nick Patrick** into a meeting room moments after **J.J. Dillon** announced that Patrick would referee the main event between **Hulk**



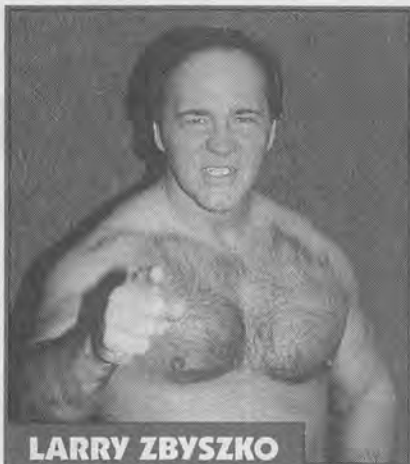
NICK PATRICK

Hogan and Sting. When Patrick emerged from the room and saw me standing in the hallway, he looked back toward the door and started yelling, "Bischoff, Hall, if you guys ever so much as lay a hand on me again, I'll see both of you in court!" I knew as soon as I saw the initial look of surprise on his face that the NWO had bought him off.

I tried to find Dillon, but to no avail. I had to get back to ringside to photograph the matches. Maybe

Bret Hart noticed all this, too, and maybe that's why he confronted Patrick about his supposed fast count against Sting and had the match restarted.

Eddy Guerrero retained his cruiserweight belt with a victory over **Dean Malenko** that night, but Malenko really hurt him in the match. I noticed Eddy wincing in pain as he left the MCI Center. He lost the title to **Ultimo Dragon** in less than five minutes the next night ... **Scott Hall** showed his cowardly side when he refused to substitute for **Kevin Nash**, who was ill and could not appear for his scheduled match against **The Giant**. When Dillon offered Hall the contract, Hall told him, "I don't want to hurt the guy, because when Kev, the real giant of wrestling, gets better, he'll want to do the deed himself. I don't want to hurt Kev's feelings and hurt the guy before Kev is able to get his hands on him."



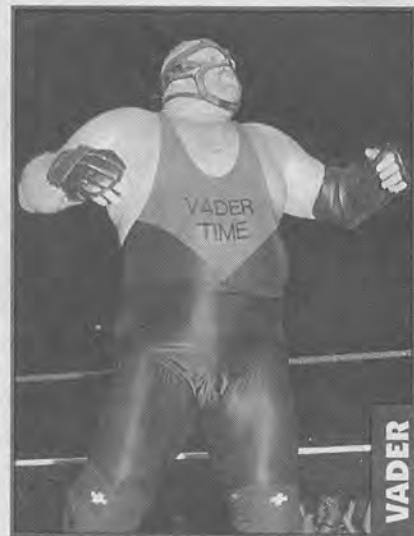
LARRY ZBYSZKO

Instead of secluding himself so he could concentrate on his bout against Bischoff, **Larry Zbyszko** was walking the hallways and mingling with other wrestlers up until the last few moments before his match. He even let me interview him and

said he wasn't a bit nervous until he and Bischoff came face-to-face in a hallway.

"It was about a half-hour ago," he said. "He had about seven security guards with him for protection just in case I might want to end it all for the NWO a little early tonight. I looked him right in the eyes, and I could tell he had no fear of me at all, and that really spooked me. That was the moment I started to feel the entire weight of WCW on my shoulders. Now I know that I have to win, because if I don't, I'll never be able to face the wrestlers or the fans again!"

He did win, of course, and all the WCW wrestlers were relieved when he did.



VADER

Now onto other news: **Vader** has finally been convicted of assaulting and insulting a television host in Kuwait last year. Although the maximum penalty for the offenses was one year in prison, Vader was ordered to pay a mere \$166 fine. The victim, **Bassam al-Othman**, may still file a civil suit ... The WWF

KIN' NEWS

By Bill Apter

announced that it has opened negotiations with **Mike Tyson** for an appearance at **WrestleMania XIV**. As of press time, neither the federation nor Tyson's camp would hint at what they had in mind for "Iron" Mike, but I'll bet **Marc Mero** will be involved!

One of wrestling's biggest stars—and I mean that literally—**Yokozuna**, is starring in a Diet Coke commercial ... **WWF World champion Shawn Michaels** appeared on several episodes of the TV show *Pictionary* ... **Johnny Ace**, who has spent much of his career wrestling for All-Japan Pro Wrestling, has opened up negotiations with the **WWF**.



SAVIO VEGA

Savio Vega became the top contender to the **Catch Wrestling Association** heavyweight title, which is held by **Marshall Duke** (a.k.a. **Duke "The Dumpster" Droese**), in December. He nearly beat Duke and says he hopes to return to Europe to challenge for the belt again soon ... **Dutch Mantel** continues to try to beat **Ray Gonzales** for the **World Wrestling Council Universal** title.

Mantel has also started wrestling in **Music City Wrestling** ... **Mo**, formerly of **Men on a Mission**, has signed with **Music City** promoters as well.

Philadelphia's Grande Wrestling Alliance has announced that it will hold a tournament to crown a cruiserweight champion in March. **Billy Real**, **Kid America**, and **Flash Wheeler** have already entered ... **Madd Maxx** has beaten **New Dimension Wrestling** heavyweight champion **Rick Link** for the gold.

Jersey All-Pro Wrestling junior



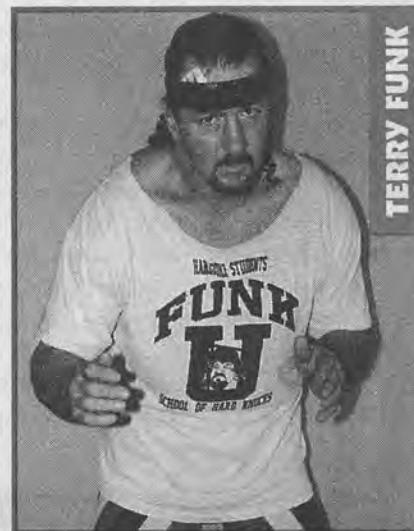
RIK RATCHET

heavyweight champion **Rik Ratchet** is now the number-one contender to the heavyweight title, which is held by **911**. Interesting, because there's a weight difference of about 170 pounds between the two. "No big guy was ever able to squash me before," Ratchet says. "That **911** is just a clumsy oaf. My speed and my wrestling ability will be his downfall, and I will have both belts."

JAPW officials say there is no rule forbidding one wrestler from holding more than one title as long

as each title is defended at least once every 30 days. By the way, **Maryland's National Wrestling League** banned **911** after he viciously attacked referee **Dexter Alexander**.

Mankind/Cactus Jack/Dude Love



TERRY FUNK

is thrilled to have **Chainsaw Charlie** as an ally in the **WWF**. Under the mask, it's pretty obvious that **Chainsaw** is **Terry Funk**. In the past, **Cactus** has remarked numerous times about how he used to idolize **Funk** and admires his style of wrestling. Even though the two have had an on-again, off-again feud going for years, that respect has never disappeared. But **Funk** won't come out and admit that he is **Charlie**.

"Hell, let's just say that **Chainsaw Charlie** and **Terry Funk** are kind of like **Mankind**, **Cactus**, and **Dude Love**," said **Funk**. "I mean, in one night, you might see all three of **Mick Foley's** strange personalities. Hell, there might be one night when you see **Chainsaw** and ol' **Terry Funk** doin' the same thing!"

That's all for now. I'll see you at the matches! □

WRESTLERS CAN BE very annoying. To each other.

Now, that's not my opinion. It's the opinion of many wrestlers in many federations who can't understand the behavior of their peers, even the ones they like. Wrestlers spend a lot of time with each other in close quarters, more than most husbands and wives, and the bad habits of some annoy others big-time.

For example, "Diamond" Dallas Page likes to smoke cigars. That's hardly a secret. Just about every time I walk into the fan favorites' locker room before or after a card, I'll find Page relaxing in front of his stall puffing on a cigar. That's fine. Sure, to many it's a disgusting habit, but these days cigar smoking is a disgusting habit that's in style. A lot of people are smoking cigars.

"The problem," said a WCW wrestler who demanded anonymity, "is that he smokes the cheapest stogies. You'd think he'd have some taste. You'd think Kimberly would tell him to clean up his act. I swear the man's never seen a Cuban cigar. He smokes these cheap cigars that he probably buys for 10 cents apiece at the neighborhood newsstand, and he stinks up the entire locker room. Everybody's disgusted by it, but nobody wants to say anything. Heck, I enjoy a good cigar now and then, but when

ON THE ROAD

With Dave Lenker

he lights up, it smells like cow manure."

Hmmmmmm. Very tasty.

Page's answer to this accusation: "I smoke only the finest cigars. And nobody has ever complained, at least not to my face. Whoever told that to you probably doesn't know the difference between a good cigar—which is the *only* kind I smoke—and a cheap one."

Another example: The Sandman. The man likes his beer. The man loves his beer. Heck, the man lives for drinking beer. Not only does he

like drinking beer, but he likes smashing beer cans against his head.

The problem here isn't that the beer is cheap, although I think it is. The problem is that Sandman has apparently never heard of a garbage can.

"You walk into the locker room after Sandman's been there and it looks like there's just been a huge fraternity party," said an ECW wrestler. "He throws his beer cans onto the floor and just leaves them there. Hasn't the man ever heard of a garbage can? Then sometimes the cans aren't empty, so beer spills out all over the floor. Let me tell you something: If I trip and fall over one of Sandman's beer cans sometime, he's going to pay the price."

(Continued on page 72)

This photo *seems* to tell us that The Giant doesn't care for the cigars that his Dallas Page smokes. Or maybe he just hates the smell of all cigar smoke. We know that at least one WCW fan favorite objects to DDP's habit.



Bloodbaths, Brawls and Women

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ECW TV 16 Sandman vs. Cactus Jack (3 matches), Raven vs. Dreamer, Melanie vs. Guerrero, Benoit and Melanie vs. Mikey and Norman Smiley, Raven and Richards vs. Dreamer and Mikey.

ECW TV 17 Sandman vs. Cactus (Barbed Wire Match), Sandman vs. Shane Douglas, Beulah vs. Luna Vachon, Public Enemy vs. Pitbulls, and the ECW debut of the Gangstas.

ECW TV 18 Raven and Richards beating Public Enemy for the Tag Titles, Taz vs. 2 Cold Scorpio, Taz and Eddy Guerrero vs. Melanie and Scorpio (twice), Cactus and Dreamer and Pitbulls vs. Raven and Richards and Dudley. Cactus and Melanie and Scorpio vs. Steiner and Guerrero, Public Enemy vs. Gangstas.

ECW TV 20 Melanie vs. Guerrero (Final ECW Match), Francine vs. Beulah (Cat Fight), Raven and Richards vs. Pitbulls, Steiners vs. Scorpio and Benoit, Raven and Richards vs. Pitbulls (Double Dog Collar Match).

ECW TV 21 Steiner and Taz vs. Eliminators and Scorpio, Steve Austin imitating Hulk Hogan, Rey Misterio Jr. Vs. Psicosis (twice), Public Enemy and Mikey vs. Sandman and Scorpio and New Jack (Cage Match).

ECW TV 22 Public Enemy vs. Gangstas, Taz and Rick Steiners vs. Eliminators. Cactus vs. Dreamer, Misterio Jr. and Konnan vs. LaParka and Psicosis, Sandman vs. Mikey.

ECW TV 23 Cactus and Raven vs. Dreamer and Funk, Heavenly Bodies debut in ECW, Konnan vs. Jason, Mikey vs. Misterio Jr., Steve Austin vs. Mikey (twice), Sabu return to ECW.

ECW TV 24 Steve Austin and Mikey and Sandman (3 way dance), Misterio Jr. Vs. Psicosis (Mexican Death Match), Raven vs. Dreamer, Public Enemy vs. Heavenly Bodies, Shane Douglas returns to ECW.

ECW TV 25 Eliminators vs. 911 and Rey Misterio Jr., Konnan vs. Sandman (Bloodbath), Sabu vs. Steve Richards, Rob Van Dam vs. Axl Rotten, Scorpio vs. Mikey, Sabu vs. Van Dam, Misterio Jr. vs. Juventud Guerrera, Headhunters return, Sandman vs. Raven.

ECW TV 26 Raven and Richards vs. Dreamer and Douglas, Brian Pillman debuts in ECW. Headhunters vs. Bruise Brothers, Raven vs. Douglas (Pillman runs in). Sabu vs. Scorpio, Eliminators and Richards vs. Pitbulls and Francine (Triple Dog Collar Match).

ECW TV 27 Headhunters vs. Gangstas, Cactus vs. Chris Jericho, Misterio Jr. vs. Guerrero (2 matches), Cactus vs. Mikey (Cactus' last ECW match). Gangstas - Eliminators Brawl)

ECW TV 28 Raven and Bruise Brothers vs. Dreamer, Douglas and Sandman. Sabu vs. Mikey, Taz vs. Jericho, Pitbulls and Dreamer vs. Bruises and Lee, Dreamer vs. Lee, Raven vs. Douglas.

ECW TV 29 Sabu vs. VanDam, Douglas vs. Scorpio, Taz vs. Scorpio, Jericho vs. Mikey, Jericho vs. Scorpio, Eliminators and Lee vs. Dreamer and Gangstas.

ECW TV 30 Brian Lee and Bruise Brothers vs. Dreamer and Pitbulls, Raven vs. Pitbull 2, VanDam vs. Mikey, Douglas vs. Pitbull 2, Sandman vs. Richards.

ECW TV 31 Jericho vs. Pitbull #2, Dreamer vs. Lee (Weapons Match), Gangstas vs. Eliminators, Sabu vs. VanDam, Eliminators vs. Sabu and Mikey, Jerico vs. Douglas vs. Pitbull #2 vs. Scorpio (4 Way Dance).

ECW TV 32 Sabu vs. Louie Spicolli, Sandman vs. Richards, Eliminators vs. Okano and Yamada, Dreamer vs. Raven from Japan, Shane Douglas vs. Pitbull #2, and a 4-way dance for the Tag Titles.

ECW TV 33 Doug urnas vs. VanDam, Taz vs. Dreamer, Lee vs. Terry Gordy (Bad Street Match), Dudley vs. Axl and D-von Dudley.

ECW TV 34 Sabu and VanDam vs. Furnas and Kroffat (30 minute draw) Taz vs. Johnny Smith, Eliminators and Lee vs. Dreamer and Gordy and Steve Williams, Douglas vs. Pitbull #2, Lee and Richards vs. Dreamer and Sandman (Ultimate Jeopardy).

ECW TV 35 Jericho vs. Scorpio, Eliminators vs. Gangstas, Taz vs. Guido (Shoot Fight), Sandman vs. Scorpio, Douglas vs. Dreamer, Sabu and VanDam vs. Kroffat and Furnas.

ECW TV 36 ECW Royal Rumble, Douglas and Francine vs. Dreamer and Beulah, Taz vs. VanDam, Raven vs. Mikey, Raven v. Sandman, Candito vs. VanDam.

ECW TV 37 Gangstas vs. Morton and Rich, Raven vs. Sandman (Texas Death Match), Raven vs. Sandman (Hair vs. Belt), Raven vs. Steve Williams, Funk vs. Brian Lee.

ECW TV 38 Funk vs. Tommy Rich, Sabu and VanDam vs. Eliminators (Tables and Ladders), Dudleys vs. Gangstas, Funk and Dreamer vs. Lee and Raven, Lance Storm vs. Balls Mahoney.

ECW TV 39 Taz vs. VanDam, Funk vs. Brian Lee, Balls vs. Sandman (Twice), Funk vs. Axl Rotten, Sabu vs. Spike Dudley, Raven and Shane vs. Dreamer and Funk, Great Sasuke and Hamada and nanina vs Taka and Men's Tech and Dick Togo (Michinoku Pro G-Man).

ECW TV 40 Preview of "Barely Legal", Eliminators vs. Dudleys vs. Gangstas (3 Way Dance), Video clips of "Barely Legal", Rob Van Dam vs. Pitbull #2, and the Evolution of Mr. Monday Night.

ECW TV 41 Gangstas vs. Dudleys vs. Eliminators (3 Way Dance), Bam Bam Bigelows return to ECW, Rude's debut as TV commentator, Sabu and Van Dam vs. Taz and Candito, Dreamer vs. Spicolli, Sandman vs. Balls, Raven and Richards vs. Funk and Dreamer.

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Behind the Dressing Room Door

by Dave Rosenbaum

HAVE A CONFESSION to make, dear readers, I nearly did something terribly rude and inconsiderate. I very nearly crossed over the boundaries of decency into an area in which no thinking and feeling person should wander. Fortunately, Publisher Stu Saks, who has always been my mentor, my voice of reason, kept me from making this awful mistake. In fact, he not only kept me from making the mistake; he forbade me from making this mistake.

The theme of this column was going to be The Purgatory Computer Tournament.

It was to be a takeoff on the Computer Tournament in this issue, and all of the combatants were going to be wrestlers who had died over the past 15 years.

The roster of combatants was going to be impressive: David, Chris, Mike, and Kerry Von Erich. Brian Pillman. Bruiser Brody. Gino Hernandez. Dino Bravo. Eddie Gilbert. Adrian Adonis. John Studd. Crusher Blackwell.

"You can't do that," Saks admonished me. "It's in poor taste."

"Look, Stu," I said. "The idea of the tournament isn't to ridicule these people. It's to point out how many great wrestlers we've lost. Look at the list. Imagine if we still

had all the Von Erichs. Imagine if Brian Pillman and Eddie Gilbert were alive today. Can you imagine Bruiser Brody in ECW? He would have been incredible. It's sad, Stu, really sad."

"I don't care," Stu said. "It's in poor taste."

So I thought about it and made a decision. Stu was right. The idea was in bad taste. I wasn't going to press the issue any further. There will be no Purgatory Computer Tournament this or any other year. The idea, excuse my choice of words, is dead.

But there is this truth: Wrestling has lost a lot over the past 15 years. Add to the list wrestlers who have lost their careers to injuries, like Magnum T.A. and Rick Steamboat, and you can see how much it has lost. I can think of no other sport in which so many top stars have either been seriously injured or died. Wrestling has suffered some terrible losses. And, unfortunately, it is sure to suffer more.

Who knows? Maybe instead of Bret Hart vs. Shawn Michaels, the finals of the 1998 INSIDE WRESTLING Computer Tournament would have featured Gino Hernandez vs. David Von Erich. We would have introduced them as two-time WWF World champion Gino Hernandez and three-time WCW World champion David Von Erich, because there's a good chance these two men would have gone on to such greatness.

Instead, they died well before their time.

Eddie Gilbert. What a talent. Dead. Before his time.

The Von Erich family. Incredibly talented. Incredibly burdened.

Fritz Von Erich, the father, died this year, and now only Doris, his ex-wife, and Kevin remain.

Bruiser Brody. Murdered in a shower room in Puerto Rico. Sure, if he was alive today, he'd be a wrestler on the decline, but he was such a battler and such an intense brawler that it's easy to imagine him winning titles in ECW and still drawing huge crowds in Japan.

Brian Pillman. His death was so recent that it's hard to think of him as gone.

And how about Andre the Giant? What if he hadn't suffered from a genetic deformity? What if his heart had been stronger? Would we still have him? Would he still be near the top of his game? The answer to the last question is probably not, but it would have been nice if we at least had Andre around and doing something related to wrestling.

(Continued on page 74)



Eddie Gilbert (applying a sleeperhold on Jerry Lawler) is one of the many young superstars the sport has lost during the last 15 years. Unfortunately, Rosenbaum notes, there will likely be more untimely losses.

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the Insider

by Brandi Mankiewicz

(The opinions expressed in "The Insider" are those of Brandi Mankiewicz alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of anyone else on the staff of this magazine.)

CONSIDER GREAT great columnists like myself very lucky. We are allowed to express our opinions (no matter how acerbic or mean-spirited they may be) in a written forum as we sit comfortably behind our computer monitors. It

makes spewing my venom at those who besmirch the fine art of rule-breaking so much easier.

Occasionally, though, I must venture out to confront my subjects (column, not royal). I am no stranger to confrontations, though my killer looks and captivating charm help me diffuse difficult situations.

But coming face-to-face with Shawn Michaels, who has been a never-ending source of irritation for months, would require more of me

than just being the perfect woman that I am. In this column and others, I've made it crystal-clear that I question his manhood, his sincerity, and his outright dedication to rulebreaking.

And I knew one day we would meet.

So when Saks gave the assignment of interviewing DeGeneration X to a certain nameless writer/cartoonist who contributes frequently to this magazine, it was only by the purest coincidence that he (whoops) fell ill. Ever the team player, I volunteered to fill in for the sickly scribe.

"You're nuts," Stu spat when I made the offer. "Michaels knows how you feel. I'm sure he reads the column. I don't think we'd accomplish anything. It's a disaster waiting to happen."

He was right. Nothing good could come from a meeting between Michaels and me. Unable to produce one good reason why I should be given the job, I resorted to the next best thing—a combination of whining and pestering that didn't cease until the boss gave in.

Before long (boy, Saks is really losing his edge!), I was off to face the Wizard of Odd. I have to admit, it was all I could do to maintain my professional demeanor as I giggled while driving off to confront my punching bag.

I arrived at the makeshift offices of DX just in time for the one-on-one. I walked in to the darkened lobby that was illuminated only by a defective fluorescent light. No receptionist, but that was no shock. Who would want to work for such a group?

"Hello?" I called out.

"Anderson, did we have a little operation since the last time we met?" Michaels called out from his corner office, oblivious to my identity. "Or did someone take offense at your so-called artistic ability?"

"Neither," I responded, walking into the doorway of Michaels' spacious office. "Brandi Mankiewicz. I

(Continued on page 76)



The members of DeGeneration X—Chyna, Michaels, and Hunter Hearst Helmsley—have unsavory qualities that rulebreaking aficionados and their fellow WWF bad guys can't warm up to. I include myself in that group.

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ON Assignment

By Liz Hunter

WHILE THIS ISN'T the column about nothing, it sure comes close. Just something on my brain as it relates to professional wrestling's big picture. But before I go on, allow me to provide access to you, the fans. I am officially online. Yes, I have joined Stu, Bill, Steve, and that other chick. I can be reached at LizPWI@aol.com. But enough about me ...

While I've observed this trend over the past few years, I haven't sat down to analyze the wherefores and whys of professional wrestling's resurgent popularity.

Cable ratings are going through

the proverbial roof, wrestlers are appearing on mainstream television, and fans are packing arenas around the country. Don't look now, but wrestling is approaching the level of popularity it enjoyed in the mid-'80s. This time, however, pro wrestling has arrived by an alternative route: WCW.

So how does WCW do it? Like everything else it has done, WCW has made its impact slowly and quietly, this time with one goal in mind: to get recognized as the number-one promotion in North America. People like Eric Bischoff would love to drive the WWF out of business, but for now they're

thinking something like, *The competition can stick around, but they have to stay at the back of the bus.*

Yet the most remarkable aspect of WCW's success, I think, has been its silence. Growth has been steady, but so silent that I've heard a lot of people wonder out loud, "When did this happen ... and how?"

Was it the genius of Eric Bischoff, or Ted Turner's hefty bank account? It is a combination of the two. After all, what did Bischoff have that Bill Watts, Jim Herd, and Kip Frey did not? Apparently a lot. He was the man who convinced Turner that he could make WCW a stronger promotion than the WWF if he made a strong financial commitment to the promotion. He did, and the results speak for themselves.

But why rehash the past if the present is the real story? Week after week, *WCW Monday Nitro* makes the WWF's *Raw Is War* look like a second-rate show. It's certainly far from a bad show, but to me, it just doesn't compare well to *Nitro*. As for those ratings, no matter who the WWF signs or how many times it airs *Raw* live, it cannot get a leg-drop up on the competition. For more than 18 eighteen months, WCW has creamed the WWF on Monday nights.

The WWF's only
(Continued on page 77)

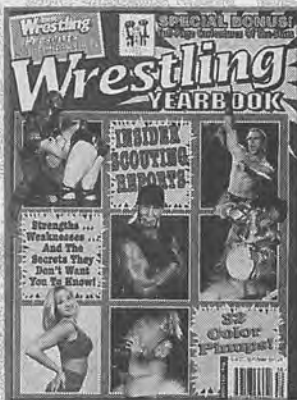


The set of *WCW Monday Nitro* has become a familiar sight to wrestling fans over the last two-plus years. Wrestling as a whole has become more popular during that time, and WCW can take a lot of the credit for that.

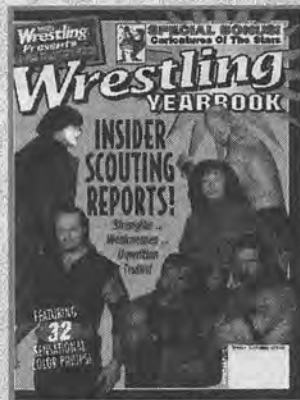
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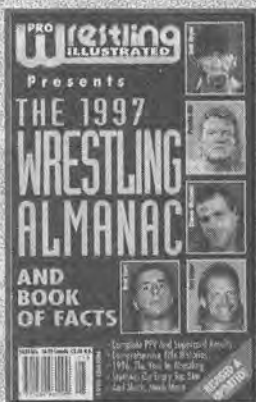
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INSIDE WRESTLING CAPSULE PROFILE ²⁶⁵

CURT HENNIG

HOW DO YOU summarize an 18-year career that has seen as many feuds, title reigns, controversies, and injuries as Curt Hennig's has? After accepting Ric Flair's offer to replace Arn Anderson as The Four Horsemen's enforcer this summer, Hennig shocked everyone by betraying Flair at Fall Brawl '97 and joining the NWO ... Came a long way from St. Paul, Minnesota, where he made his pro debut against Bill Howard in 1980 ... The son of former AWA rulebreaker Larry "The Ax" Hennig, Curt started his career in the AWA, but joined the WWF in 1981 ... Never made much progress there and returned to the AWA in 1985 and teamed with Scott Hall to beat Steve Regal and Jimmy Garvin for the AWA tag team belts on January 18, 1986 (*"Still the best partner I ever had"*) ... Won the AWA World heavyweight belt from Nick Bockwinkel on May 2, 1987 ... Was voted Most Improved Wrestler in PWI's Achievement '87 Awards balloting, but he refused to accept the award, claiming he deserved Wrestler of the Year honors (*"I still believe that"*) ... Lost the AWA title to Jerry Lawler on May 8, 1988, then returned to the WWF ... Started calling himself "Mr. Perfect" in 1989 ... Defeated Tito Santana on April 23,

1990, to become Intercontinental champ, then lost the belt to Kerry Von Erch at SummerSlam '90 in Philadelphia ... Briefly managed by Bobby Heenan ... Regained the I-C belt from Von Erch on November 19, but lost it again to Bret Hart at SummerSlam '91 (*"I'll*

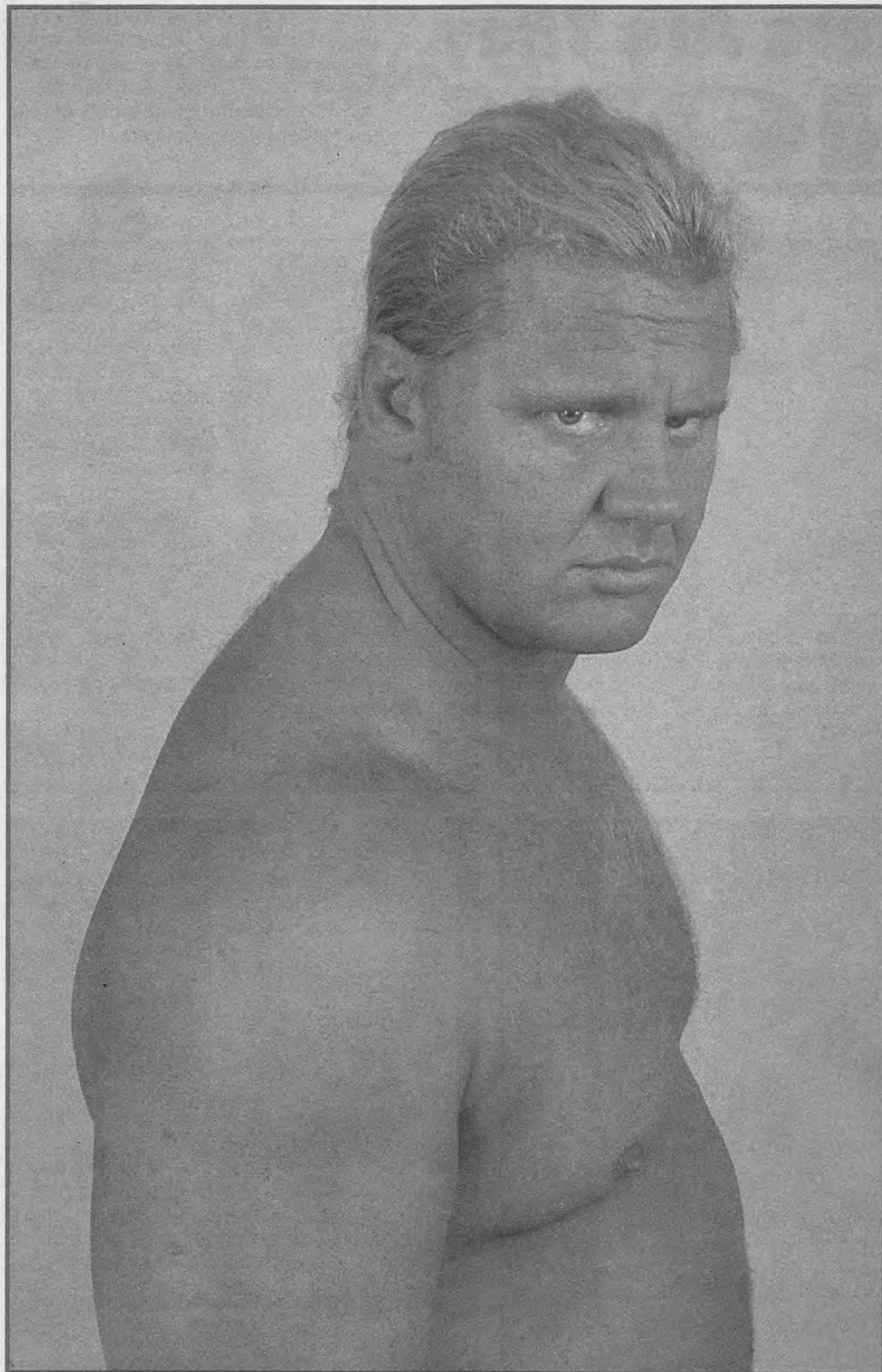
the roof") ... As a fan favorite, he had a classic match with Bret at the 1993 King of the Ring tournament and had exciting feuds with Shawn Michaels and Kevin "Diesel" Nash that same year ... Refereed the Lex Luger-Yokozuna WWF title match at WrestleMania



Making his return to the sport after a nearly four-year absence, Curt Hennig was the runner-up for PWI Comeback of the Year honors. With each match, he is coming closer to his peak form.

avenge that soon enough") ... A nagging back injury, aggravated against Hart, kept Hennig from competing, but he remained involved by becoming executive consultant to Ric Flair in 1992. He also joined the WWF broadcast team (*"TV ratings went through*

X and disqualified Luger for putting his hands on him ("He was and is an idiot") ... Helped Hunter Hearst Helmsley beat Marc Mero for the I-C belt in 1996, but left the WWF shortly thereafter ... Finally returned to the ring on July 13, 1997, at WCW's Bash at the Beach, where he celebrated his WCW debut by walking out on tag team partner "Diamond" Dallas Page ... Seriously injured Flair's face when he slammed the door of a steel cage on it at Fall Brawl ("Just made him a little uglier than he already was"*) ... Defeated Steve McMichael for the WCW U.S. title the next night ... Has been one of the most hated men in the sport since he betrayed Flair (*"Sorry, people, but I gotta do what's best for Curt Hennig"*) ... After beating Flair in several heated grudge matches, Hennig lost the U.S. belt to Page at Starrcade ... Displayed tremendous aerial and scientific ability early in his career, but the back problems have robbed him of some agility ... As a member of the NWO, he has shown that he is still a talented and dangerous athlete (*"I will be for a long time to come"*). □*



CURT HENNIG

Where Are They NOW

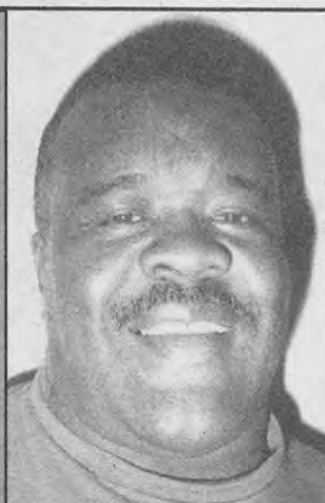
Do you have a favorite wrestler who has left your area? Are you wondering where he is today? Then this special column is just for you. Each month we will update the whereabouts of four current or former wrestlers



KING CURTIS

Curtis, who reached his peak in the early-1970s, retired to his native Hawaii almost 10 years ago. He is most famous for his matches against Chief Jay Strongbow, Dory Funk Sr., and Lord Layton. He now operates a souvenir stand on Waikiki Beach in

Honolulu. "What I miss most is the fun I had traveling with the guys and causing trouble!" he said. Younger fans may remember Curtis as Kevin Sullivan's adviser during his feud with Hulk Hogan in 1995.



JUNKYARD DOG

After working as a bouncer in various Las Vegas clubs for a while, the popular JYD has returned to wrestling. Junkyard simply couldn't resist an offer to come back to his favorite state: Louisiana. His greatest triumphs took place in the old Mid-

South promotion, which was the dominant federation in Louisiana at one time. "I don't know how long this will last," he explains, "but it's felt good to lace up the boots. It was great having my fans come out to see me again!"



MISSY HYATT

Now living in New York City, Hyatt is anxiously awaiting the premiere of her upcoming film, *Final Rinse*. But acting isn't her only interest these days. "I'm going to school to become a medical and surgical technician," she said. "The health care field fascinates

me." She got the idea after becoming both a patient and friend of famed plastic surgeon Dr. Brad J. Jacobs. By the way, Missy has been "seriously" dating Scott Putski for more than a year.



CORA COMBS

One of yesteryear's legendary lady stars, Cora had big feuds with Penny Banner, Ann Casey, and Maria Galento. She still wrestles on occasion, but that's not her only credit. Cora has been performing in country music videos for years

and will be seen in a Dolly Parton video in the near future. "I always loved country music," she says. "It's been a part of me since I was a kid. Having the chance to get involved in the industry has been a thrill."

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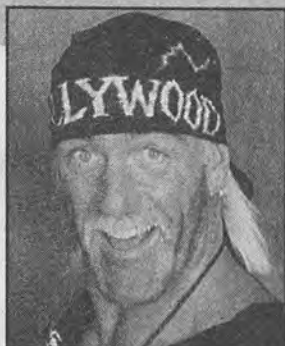
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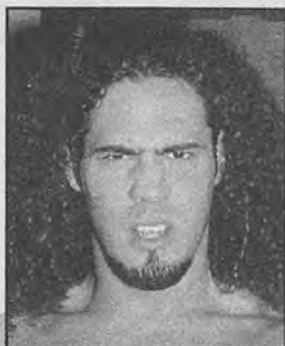
**STING
VS.
HULK HOGAN**



After months of anticipation, Sting finally wrestled WCW World champ Hogan and defeated him in a controversial Starrcade match at the MCI Center. Sting showed little ring rust from his year-plus layoff as he controlled most of the match. At one point, though, Hogan pinned Sting and Nick Patrick made the three-count, but Bret Hart complained that the count was too fast. After kayoing Patrick, he restarted the match and took over as referee. Several minutes and one Scorpion deathlock later, Sting won when Hogan submitted.

OTHER BOUTS: WCW cruiserweight champ Eddy Guerrero pinned Dean Malenko ... Vincent, Scott Norton, & Randy Savage beat Ray Traylor & Rick & Scott Steiner ... Bill Goldberg pinned Steve McMichael ... Perry Saturn beat Chris Benoit ... "Buff" Bagwell pinned Lex Luger ... Dallas Page pinned WCW U.S. champ Curt Hennig to win the title ... Larry Zbyszko defeated Eric Bischoff (Bret Hart was the special guest referee).

ALEXANDRIA, VA
BY JILL SHERMAN



**JULIO SANCHEZ
VS.
STEVE CORINO**



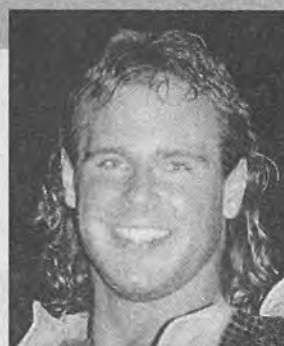
Sanchez overcame a knee injury to pin Corino for the IPWA light heavyweight title. Though both men are accomplished aerialists, the majority of the match was contested on the mat. Sanchez controlled most of this technical exhibition and kept Corino from gaining momentum. Once up and moving, though, Corino leveled Sanchez with one thunderous clothesline. Ten minutes later, the two men were still trading holds and moves. At one point, Sanchez injured his knee while kicking Corino, but Corino was unable to capitalize on this break. Sanchez surprised his opponent with a small package to win the title.

OTHER BOUTS: C.W. Anderson pinned Otto Schwanz ... Corporal Punishment defeated Ray Storm ... Joey Matthews pinned Shorty Smalls ... Cueball Carmichael pinned Christian York ... "Wiseguy" Jimmy Cicero pinned Adam Flash ... King Kong Bundy defeated Big Slam by disqualification.

HAMILTON, ONTARIO
BY LARRY MILTON



**MARC MERO
VS.
SCOTT TAYLOR**

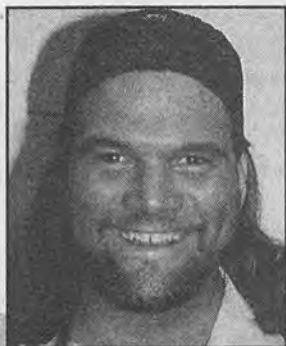


The fans cheered as Mero and Sable made their way to the ring, and this incensed Mero, who eventually sent his valet back to the dressing room so the fans would focus on him. Once the action started, Taylor rocked Mero with a series of aerial moves, but Mero retaliated with a nice dropkick. Later, Sable returned and inadvertently distracted the referee. This allowed Mero to nail Taylor with a low blow, then finish him off with the "TKO."

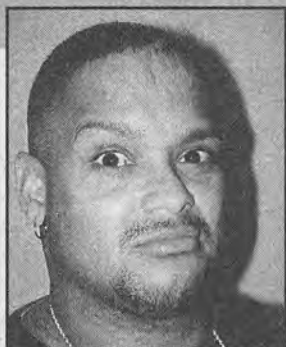
OTHER BOUTS: The Disciples of Apocalypse defeated Los Boricuas ... WWF Intercontinental champ Rocky Maivia defeated Ken Shamrock after The Nation of Domination interfered ... Steve Austin & Dude Love beat DeGeneration X ... The Undertaker defeated Goldust in a casket match ... Kane defeated The Headbangers in a handicap match ... Faarooq pinned Flash Funk ... World tag team champs The New Age Outlaws beat The New Blackjacks ... Ken Shamrock defeated Rocky Maivia in a non-title match.

WRESTLING CAPITALS

**BREMEN, GERMANY
BY ROCCI NUPIERO**



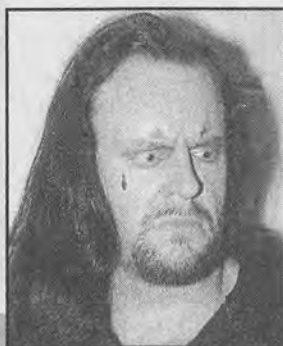
**MARSHAL DUKE
VS.
SAVIO VEGA**



Vega apparently didn't like his chances of beating CWA champ Duke (a.k.a. Duke "The Dumpster" Droese) fairly, so he smuggled a pair of scissors and a fork into the ring. After checking Vega's pockets, however, referee Didier Gapp spotted the hardware and quickly confiscated it. For a while, the match was all Vega, who attempted to finish Duke off with a series of spinning kicks. But Duke was able to fend off Savio long enough to use his "Trash Compactor" finisher and get the pin.

OTHER BOUTS: Tony St. Clair & Osamu Nishimura beat Robbie Brookside & Rhino Richards ... CWA middleweight champion Franz Schumann beat Doug Gilbert ... Ice Train beat Cannonball Grizzly by disqualification ... Masahiro Chono beat Christian Eckstein ... Ulf Herman beat Cryderman ... Ludvig Borga beat Tony Richardson by knockout in the fourth round of a boxing match.

**SYRACUSE, NY
BY JANIE HUNAN**



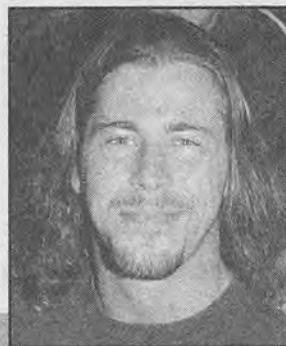
**THE UNDERTAKER
VS.
JEFF JARRETT**



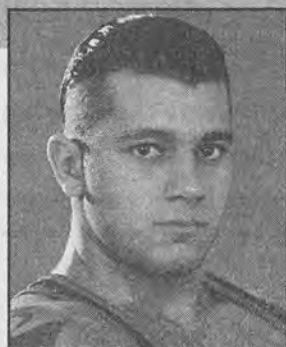
Jarrett looked overmatched during much of this match, but he won after receiving "help" from Kane. Jarrett stunned 'Taker with some punches early, but was soon felled by a legdrop. Later, just as 'Taker went to choke-slam Jarrett, the lights dimmed and Kane and Paul Bearer entered the ring. Kane choke-slammed Jarrett when Jarrett told him to attack Undertaker; thus 'Taker was disqualified. Afterward, Jarrett tried to apply a figure-four, but Undertaker choke-slammed him for his efforts.

OTHER BOUTS: Taka Michinoku pinned Brian Christopher ... Los Boricuas beat The Disciples of Apocalypse ... Butterbean beat Marc Mero by disqualification in a boxing match ... WWF World tag team champs The New Age Outlaws beat The Legion of Doom ... Hunter Hearst Helmsley pinned Sgt. Slaughter in a boot camp match ... WWF Intercontinental champ Steve Austin beat Rocky Maivia ... Ken Shamrock beat WWF World champ Shawn Michaels by disqualification.

**PHILADELPHIA, PA
BY DAWN URBANI**



**STEVIE RICHARDS
VS.
CHRIS CHETTI**



Because of a neck injury, Richards will probably never compete again. If that is the case, at least he can always say he won his last ECW Arena match. He wasted no time in nailing Chetti with a power bomb, but Chetti rebounded and went for the win with a series of submission holds that Richards escaped by reaching the ropes. Chetti continued his assault with a power bomb and a superkick, then set Richards up for a moonsault. Chetti missed, however, allowing Richards to execute his own superkick and get the win.

OTHER BOUTS: Tommy Rogers & Jerry Lynn beat Little Guido & Tracey Smothers ... Mikey Whipwreck defeated Justin Credible ... Al Snow pinned Paul Diamond ... Chris Candido & Lance Storm beat Axl Rotten & B. Mahoney and ECW tag team champs Phil Lafon & Doug Furnas in a three-way dance to win the title ... Buh Buh Ray & D-Von Dudley beat John Kronus & New Jack ... Sabu & Rob Van Dam beat The Sandman & Tommy Dreamer.



Matt Brock's **Plain Speaking**

Harder than nails, veteran wrestling reporter Matt Brock has logged more miles covering wrestling than any other journalist. Every month Matt will travel to the sport's hotbeds, reporting everything he sees without fear or favor

No place to be in the winter. The locals say it's a beautiful town around Christmas, but this is Christmas, and I'm not seeing much beauty, just a lot of dead trees and cold people. Don't know what Steve Austin was thinking when he ventured outside in this weather, but one day after he forfeited the WWF Intercontinental title to Rocky

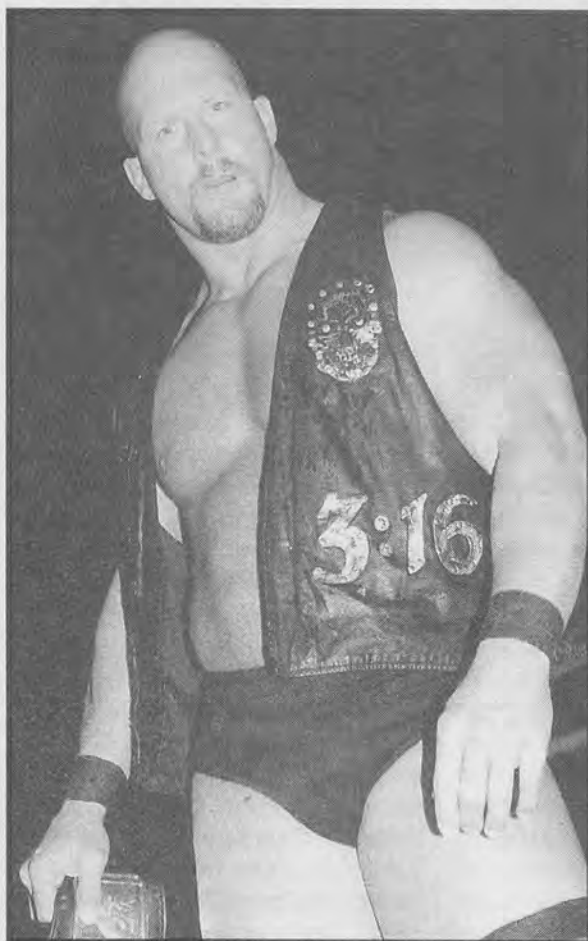
Maivia—then attacked Maivia and stole the belt right back—Austin took a walk outside in Durham and ended up tossing the belt into the river. Don't know which river and don't really care to ask. It was a river, and the way I see it, all rivers go to the same place: the ocean. If you don't believe it, take a swim one day, and you'll find out for certain.

DURHAM, NH

The point here is that Austin's gone a bit out of his mind by driving his truck to the ring and just giving up the I-C belt like it was meaningless. There are some men who have worked all their lives and still have never come close to winning the Intercontinental title, and you can be sure that if they ever got there, they'd cherish it. They wouldn't give up the belt and they wouldn't heave it into a river. Maybe Austin should get a hold of himself. He's obviously not dealing with a full deck of cards.

This used to be a heckuva town, but then they knocked down all the old buildings and turned it into a shopping mall. Now it looks like every other supposedly revitalized city in the United States—like Cleveland and Baltimore—with a brand new restaurant every other block and plenty of those newfangled beer

restaurants where you get to watch them making the beer. Who the hell wants to watch their beer being made? Beer is for drinking, not watching. They used to have a beautiful old baseball stadium downtown—you might have seen it in the movie *The Natural*—but then they knocked that down, too, and put up a new stadium that looks like every other minor league stadium in America. So now instead of having some character, Buffalo is like any other city in the United States, only colder. Disco Inferno regained the WCW TV title from Perry Saturn here, and that brings up another



STEVE AUSTIN



DISCO INFERNO

er point about Buffalo. It used to be a dead-solid National Wrestling Federation town. When the NWF met its demise in the late-'70s, the expansionist Vince McMahon Jr. and the WWF took control of the area (with the exception of one NWA card in 1989). Over the past few years, however, the WWF's been losing the exclusivity of more and more cities. Take Washington, D.C., for example. Used to be a solid WWF town. This year, WCW held Starrcade '97 there. But more on that later. As for Disco Inferno, he won the belt in Buffalo, but he couldn't defend it in Baltimore and lost it to Booker T, one of the guys from Harlem Heat. Wonder if they'll give Booker a chance to defend the belt in Harlem? That place doesn't look anything like Cleveland or Buffalo.

BUFFALO, NY

Starrcade '97. This used to be the biggest card on WCW's yearly calendar, but now with a pay-per-view every month and *Nitro* every week—actually two live TV shows a week now—it's almost impossible to tell one supercard from another. This used to be the card on which Ric Flair always defended the WCW World heavyweight title, but Flair didn't compete this year because of an injury and, besides, he's not even champion of anything anymore. Hulk Hogan was the WCW World champion, and he still should have been after Starrcade, because he cleanly pinned Sting in the center of the ring. One-two-three. No doubt about it, and anybody who accused referee Nick Patrick of

WASHINGTON, D.C.

making a fast count just wasn't paying attention. Patrick's count was not only fair, it was probably slow, and Sting wasn't kicking out anyway. Then Bret Hart refused to allow the timekeeper to ring the bell, ordered the match started—not sure where he got the authority, but he did it and got away with it—and threw Hogan back into the ring. Sting got the win by submission and took the belt. Call it a tainted belt, because in my view, Hogan's the champion. I'm no Hogan fan. Any regular reader of this space knows that. But fair is fair, and Hogan was done wrong.

Not that I had any interest in watching a Long Island Wrestling Federation card, but I'd been on the road for a while and didn't feel like wandering far from home. Besides, watching an independent card in a small arena every once in a while puts you back in touch with wrestling's roots and makes you remember where it came from, before towns were rebuilt and champions threw belts into rivers. A team called The Power Company won the Long Island Wrestling Federation tag team title in a four-way match against The Pittsburgh Steel Team, Ace Darling and Devon Storm, and Rocky Shore and Mr. Grimm, and judging from how they reacted after winning, you knew they'd hold on to those belts for as long as possible, even if a Mr. Vince McMahon Jr. came along and ordered them to defend the belts against a team they didn't want to wrestle. This whole newfangled wrestler thing is something I'll never understand. Maybe once every year, all the high-paid wrestlers should be forced to watch a small independent card, or maybe even wrestle on one. They'd realize how lucky they were. □

QUEENS, NY

THE INSIDE WRESTLING



joined WCW. At first, it looked as if Hart would become a member of the NWO, but appearances turned out to be false. At Starrcade '97, Hart helped Larry Zbyszko retain control of *Nitro* for WCW, then helped Sting defeat Hulk Hogan for the WCW World title.

It was quite a year for Hart.

If our computer has any powers of prognostication, 1998 should also be quite a year for Hart.

We drew that conclusion from our *Inside Wrestling* Computer Tournament, the only place in the world where wrestlers from all federations battle each other in a no-disqualification, no-countout format

for world wrestling supremacy. This is where the true world champion is crowned. Accept no substitutes.

Okay, so maybe we're getting carried away. But if the WWF and WCW are going to battle each other on Monday night TV, shouldn't they battle each other in the ring, too?

The Computer Tournament is wrestling in its purest form. Man vs. man. A clear-cut winner in each bout. Best of seven series. Sixteen wrestlers. Talent vs. talent. May the best man win. It's a world in which the most notorious rulebreakers cannot benefit from outside interference, because there are no managers at ringside, no teammates, no bought-off referees, no impostor Stings.

THE PREVIOUS YEAR was an eventful one for Bret "The Hitman" Hart. He won and lost the WWF World heavyweight title. He defected from the federation, escaping a 20-year contract that appeared to be ironclad, and

FIRST ROUND

QUARTERFINALS

SEMIFINALS

KANE

JEFF JARRETT

KEVIN NASH

DEAN MALENKO

SHAWN MICHAELS

KENSUKE SASAKI

ROB VAN DAM

ROCKY MAIVIA

CHAMP

COMPUTER TOURNAMENT 1998

For this year's tournament, we used an IBM-compatible computer with a Pentium 233 MHZ central processing unit. From there, we added 128 megs of RAM, packed in a fast hard drive with four gigs of storage, and used the updated Windows 95 for Workgroups operating system. Then we handed over this very high-priced toy to our resident computer expert and told him, "Remember that program you wrote last year? Make it better."

Guess what. He did.

The program takes into consideration every possible factor: records, quality of opposition, stamina, offense, defense, scientific skills, ability to adjust to opponents, injury history, head-to-head history,

and even factors in injuries suffered earlier in the tournament.

All matches were held at neutral sites.

For the 1998 *Inside Wrestling* Computer Tournament, we chose 16 of the finest wrestlers in the world: defending champion Kevin Nash, Shawn Michaels, Bret Hart, The Giant, Rob Van Dam, Eddy Guerrero, Shane Douglas, Lex Luger, Kane, Jeff Jarrett, Kensuke Sasaki, Dean Malenko, Rocky Maivia, Steve Austin, Curt Hennig, and The Undertaker.

All of last year's first-round losers were ruled ineligible this year: Hunter Hearst Helmsley, Hulk Hogan, Sting, Chris Benoit, "Diamond" Dallas Page, Kenta Kobashi, Flash Funk, and Scott

Hall. We took into consideration that Sting is the WCW World champion, but decided against allowing him into the tournament. The previous year's winner, Kevin Nash, received an automatic bid.

We programmed the computer to randomly select a bracket for a single-elimination tournament with best-of-seven match series; the matches were held at the rate of one per day in each round.

Each match was fought to a submission or pinfall. There were no time limits. Traditional wrestling rules applied, although there were no countouts.

It was a computer tournament that tested the imagination. A computer dream tournament.

And now, let the games begin!

SEMIFINALS

QUARTERFINALS

FIRST ROUND

CHAMPIONSHIP

SHANE DOUGLAS
LEX LUGER

EDDY GUERRERO
BRET HART

THE GIANT
STEVE AUSTIN

THE UNDERTAKER
CURT HENNIG



KANE vs. JEFF JARRETT

FIRST

Our tourney opens with a match that has never happened in real life involving a wrestler, Kane, who is making his dream tournament debut. It's a classic dream matchup in this way: Kane has size and power, Jarrett is a traditional wrestler who depends upon his mat skills. A year ago, it would have been impossible to even consider Kane defeating Jarrett, but things have changed. Jarrett has lacked career stability. Kane has become one of the most improved wrestlers in the world.

The series got off to a slow start as Jarrett and Kane decided to measure each other in match one. There was little action until the six-minute mark when Jarrett missed with a dropkick. That allowed Kane to whip Jarrett into the ropes, and

after a Jarrett leapfrog, Kane came back with a clothesline that momentarily stunned Jarrett. The pace picked up as the WWF foes tried their best moves on each other. Kane missed with a flying clothesline and went face-first into a turnbuckle. Jarrett tried to set up Kane for a vertical suplex, but discovered that the larger Kane wasn't sufficiently weakened.

The match ended at 11:15 with Jarrett climbing to the second rope for an aerial maneuver. But Kane got up, walked over to Jarrett, picked him up by the trunks, and dumped him onto the mat. Rather than use his trademark tombstone piledriver—The Undertaker's trademark, too—he scored with an elbowdrop, then covered Jarrett for the pin.

The pace picked up in match two. Jarrett controlled the action from the opening bell and had the lumbering Kane on the move. Kane made the critical mistake of chasing Jarrett, who missed with as many dropkicks as he scored. But Jarrett served his purpose by tiring Kane. With only four minutes gone, Kane was clearly exhausted and Jarrett had control. Kane missed with clumsy flying clotheslines, knocking himself senseless when he landed throat-first on the rope, and submitted to Jarrett's figure-four.

So the series was even, but Jarrett appeared to have the momentum. Kane had made a dumb mistake in match two and Jarrett had capitalized. But when Jarrett tried the same strategy in match three, Kane backed off.



Jarrett uses a headlock here, but he rarely had the opportunity to apply one on Kane. He was, however, able to use his speed to dodge Kane a few times.

Jarrett spent the first two minutes going after Kane, and Kane spent the first two minutes avoiding contact. Jarrett got frustrated. He didn't know what to do. Then Jarrett made the mistake of lunging after him. Kane caught him cleanly, then choke-slammed him to the mat. At 4:15, match three ended in a pinfall victory for Kane.

Now Kane knew what to do and Jarrett had no idea. Jarrett tried the same strategy in match four, but again Kane backed off. He won again, this time with a tombstone piledriver after only 3:58. And in match five, a desperate Jarrett made desperation mistakes. Kane won again, this time at 8:18, following a choke-slam.

Kane wins the series, 4-1.



Kane has stunned even Big Van Vader with his patented flying forearm from the second rope. Jeff Jarrett, who weighs 200 pounds less than Vader, was no match for these brutal, high-impact moves.

KEVIN NASH vs. DEAN MALENKO

ROUND

Talk about your classic matchups of power and size vs. skill. Nash, formerly known as Diesel, is 7', 356 pounds. Malenko, the former WCW cruiserweight champion, is 5'9", 216 pounds. Nash relies on power, a crippling "jackknife" power bomb, and the interference of the NWO. Malenko, "The Man Of A Thousand Holds," is a master of wrestling science. But can he beat the big man?

And can he beat the big man at his best game, which is computer tournaments? Nash was last year's winner, beating Shawn Michaels in the finals. That's why Nash was an overwhelming favorite to win this first-round matchup.

But Malenko wouldn't make it easy for him. And in the world of computer tournaments, there is no

such thing as interference by the NWO.

Malenko wanted to keep Nash on the run, but he also knew getting too close made him vulnerable to the power bomb. So Malenko attacked in quick strikes, going after Nash's legs and, occasionally, his back. Malenko's strategy wasn't to keep Nash moving around the ring, as much as it was to keep him moving in circles. We should note that Nash's surgically repaired knee was taken into account by the computer, and Malenko used that "knowledge" to attempt several leg takedowns.

Malenko won the first match using just that strategy. Nash, mindful of his injured knee, spent so much time trying to protect it that he left himself vulnerable in other areas. Malenko scored with a high dropkick to the chest, then when Nash chased after him, took out Nash's good leg. With Nash down on the mat—and his size advantage nullified—Malenko went in for the kill. He landed three straight knee-drops on Nash's bad knee, then scored with his patented "Texas cloverleaf" finisher. Match one, shockingly, went to Malenko.

But the defending computer champion would not go down quietly and came out for match two with renewed energy and determination. Malenko, realizing Nash was an angry wrestler, didn't go after him this time—and that might have cost him the match. Malenko had to be the aggressor, but this time he wasn't. Once Nash got his hands on him, the match was over. Nash dropped him with a series of lefts and rights, then floored him with a



Malenko had a difficult time bending Nash's long legs into a "Texas cloverleaf." When he finally did, though, it worked like a charm.



Kevin Nash's 356 pounds come crashing down on Lex Luger's neck and shoulders. Dean Malenko, a cruiserweight, was even more vulnerable to this kind of onslaught.

big boot to the face. With Malenko down, Nash choked him with the heel of his right foot, then picked him up and dropped him throat-first onto the top rope. Malenko was sufficiently weakened, and Nash dropped an elbow into his gut to finish off the match, via pinfall, at 4:38.

From that point on, it was all Nash. He used his "jackknife" power bomb to win match three at 8:32. Malenko had three two-counts on Nash early in match four, but couldn't finish the job, and Nash reversed a small package into a pinfall victory at 6:35. Malenko attempted a belly-to-belly suplex too early in match five—Nash wasn't nearly weak enough—and Nash simply broke the hold, turned around, and power-bombed him to the mat. Malenko lasted another five minutes, but a choke-slam won the series for Nash at 9:41.

Nash wins the series, 4-1.



SHAWN MICHAELS vs. KENSUKE SASAKI

FIRST

An American superstar vs. a Japanese superstar. It's a classic matchup in an offbeat sort of way. Michaels, in addition to his tremendous aerial skills, can kick and punch his way through a match. Sasaki is a supremely talented martial arts wrestler and the IWGP heavyweight champion. Michaels is the WWF World champion, and last year he reached the finals of the Computer Tournament before losing to Kevin Nash.

Both men came out strong. Sasaki scored with a series of arm takedowns, while Michaels used rights and lefts on Sasaki's chest. Michaels often begins his matches by kicking and punching and saves the aerial stuff for later. In this case, Michaels wanted to see how he would fare against Sasaki in close quarters.

This bout produced some fascinating interplay and counter-wrestling. Often, a takedown attempt

by Sasaki would result in a brilliant takedown by Michaels, or Michaels would attempt a standing dropkick only to be met—heel-to-heel—by a Sasaki dropkick. The wrestlers spent much of the opening match—mirroring each other, in an incredible, “anything-you-can-do-I-can-do-better” display of moves. Sasaki won the first match after dropping Michaels with a series of dropkicks.

The Heartbreak Kid bounced back in match two, just when it appeared Sasaki would take a commanding 2-0 lead. Michaels seemed sluggish for the

first six minutes but twice kicked out just before three on pin attempts. With nine minutes gone, Michaels could have gone for a superkick, but he knew Sasaki wasn't sufficiently weakened. Instead, he worked over Sasaki with kicks and punches, felled him with a clothesline, then scored with an elbow drop from the second rope—not the top rope; the risk was too great. With 17



Sasaki's aerial prowess is captivating, but *INSIDE WRESTLING*'s computer says Michaels can match the IWGP champ leap-for-leap.

minutes gone, Michaels executed a superkick and scored the pin that evened the series.

Sasaki took the third match with an easy pin after Michaels missed a superkick and landed painfully on his side.

Down 2-1, Michaels was patient in match four and finally won after nailing a piledriver to even the series once more. He won match five—a 25-minute war—by wearing down Sasaki. Ultimately, Sasaki's one-dimensional martial arts assault came up short against Michaels' diverse attack. HBK won the series after only nine minutes of match six when a frustrated Sasaki missed on three consecutive dropkicks. This time, Michaels took advantage of Sasaki's mistakes and scored the pin to win the series.

Michaels wins the series, 4-2.



Would WWF world champion Shawn Michaels be better served by goading the high-flying IWGP champ Kensuke Sasaki into a brawl?

ROB VAN DAM vs. ROCKY MAIVIA

ROUND



Rob Van Dam's agility makes his martial arts kicks even more formidable. Opponents, regardless of shape or size, find this to be a very difficult style to combat.

This wasn't exactly the highest profile match of the opening round, but it was interesting nonetheless because both men have so much talent.

Van Dam, who wandered from federation to federation in 1997, has so many moves that he could have saved a bunch for the WWF, a bunch for ECW, and a bunch for WCW, and never used the same move twice in any of the three. Maivia, the WWF Intercontinental champion and self-proclaimed leader of the Nation of Domination, likes to get close to his opponent and score with power moves.

Of all the opening-round match-

ups, this series had the most potential to go the distance. We weren't disappointed.

The pace was fast in match one. Van Dam responded to the opening bell with a series of dropkicks, and Maivia, rather than backing up after impact, came right after Van Dam. Both men wrestled as if they had something to prove. Van Dam, one of two ECW entrants in the tournament (Shane Douglas was the other), never relented and attacked Maivia from every angle. He scored and missed equally, but the hits did their damage, and Maivia couldn't get started. Van Dam won match one following a spinning savate kick that floored "The Rock" and setup the pin.

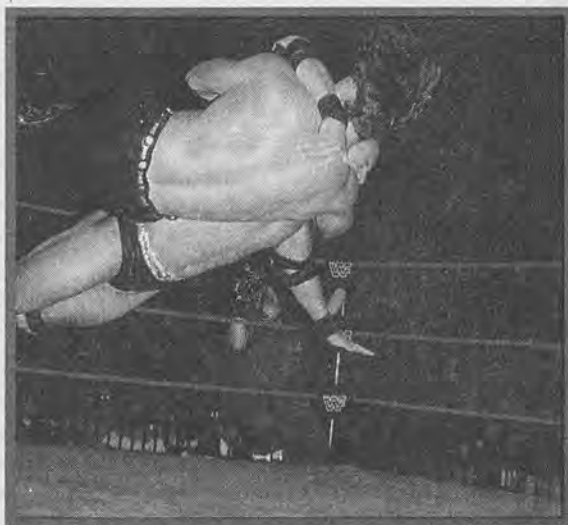
Maivia came out strong in match two, but Van Dam came out stronger. There was purpose behind every move, and each time Maivia tried to overpower him, Van Dam came up with something new. He'd follow a successful dropkick with a forearm smash, a leg-drop with a kick to the face. Van Dam's flexibility emerged, as did Maivia's frustration. Van Dam won match two following a split-legged moonsault and had a 2-0 lead.

But Maivia wouldn't give up. In match three, he was the aggressor and wrestled like a desperate man.

He smartly backed away from Van Dam's dropkicks and didn't go near the ropes. Maivia's goal was to keep the match in the center of the ring, and he succeeded. It was a winning strategy for Maivia who won via a Boston crab. Maivia won by a swinging neckbreaker in match four. Suddenly, the series was even.

Van Dam won match five. Maivia won match six. And match seven was a marathon. It lasted 35 minutes and featured 15 two-counts, nine by Van Dam and six by Maivia. Finally, with both men near exhaustion, Van Dam took a chance. He climbed to the top rope, and flipped twice through the air before scoring with a moonsault. Maivia, motionless throughout the move, collapsed to the mat, and Van Dam scored the pin at 35:10.

Van Dam wins the series, 4-3.



Rocky Maivia is one of those few competitors who is larger and faster than most of his opponents. He still had a size advantage over Van Dam, but his speed was negated.



SHANE DOUGLAS vs. LEX LUGER

FIRST



Shane Douglas will use anything to win a match: chairs, tables, or closed fists. Lex Luger came prepared for wrestling, not barroom brawling.

Can sheer desire be factored into a computer tournament match? Can we measure how much ECW champion Shane Douglas would want to beat a long-time WWF and WCW superstar such as Lex Luger?

Unfortunately, we can't. Some intangibles are simply too intangible. They can't be measured. So in this fascinating first-round bout, we have matched skill vs. skill, power vs. power, size vs. size. The better man will win.

Luger's torture rack is one of the most feared finishing maneuvers in the world, but remember: Douglas wrestles in ECW, where every wrestler is feared and the ability to endure pain is necessary for success. As for Luger, his loss to

Marcus "Buff" Bagwell at Starrcade '97—and other losses to Bagwell by DQ—indicate the beginnings of a slump after a career-year '97.

Douglas, the talented mat veteran, opened match one with a patient game plan and waited for Luger to come to him. That's exactly what happened. Luger, displaying very little patience, attacked Douglas and hammered him with a series of forearms, but they had little effect on the ECW star, who covered up and allowed Luger to hit him ... on the elbows!

Luger whipped Douglas into the ropes and prepared for a clothesline using his surgically repaired—and loaded—forearm, but Douglas ducked underneath. Luger tried again, but Douglas ducked underneath again. After the third time, Luger realized this just wasn't working, but by that time he was dazed and frustrated.

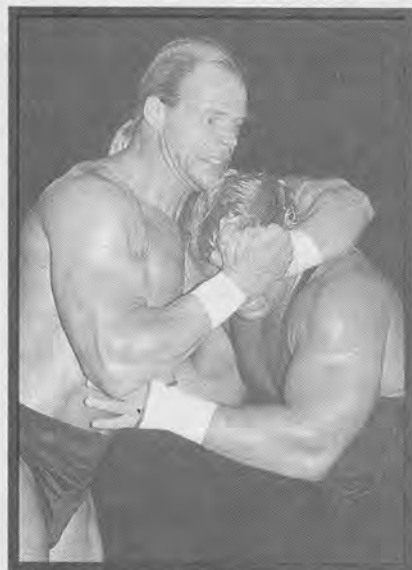
This pattern would play out during the entire series. Luger connected with four consecutive thunderous powerslams to win match one. But Douglas showed even more patience in match two and converted a missed clothesline by Luger into a belly-to-back suplex for the pin at 11:32. In match three, Douglas tested Luger's stamina, and Lex came up short. A 25-minute marathon had Luger labor-

ing through the final five minutes and Douglas won by pinfall. Douglas opened a 3-1 lead in match five when he took advantage of a mistake by Luger at the five-minute mark and belly-to-bellied him for the win.

Luger showed tremendous determination, winning matches five and six despite a combined 14 two-counts by Douglas. But in match seven, Douglas used his accumulated knowledge from the first six matches, ducked under a clothesline with eight minutes gone, got up from a bodyslam that was rendered ineffective when Luger slipped, then scored with an elbow off the second rope for the pin at 9:50.

The ECW star had beaten the WCW star.

Douglas wins the series, 4-3.



Luger relied on headlocks and other such holds in his matches against Douglas. But Douglas proved he had even more stamina than Luger.

EDDY GUERRERO vs. BRET HART

ROUND

Eddy Guerrero, the former WCW cruiserweight champion, is a Computer Tournament rookie. Last season, Bret Hart beat Chris Benoit in the first round and lost to The Giant in the second round. Here, the former WWF World champion would be tested against one of the finest daredevil wrestlers in the world.

Guerrero, at 5'8" and 221 pounds, but has a killer instinct and is fearless. Hart is 5'11" and weighs 235 pounds, but is much more powerful than Guerrero. He is also older and has been injured far more often. Guerrero is mostly an aerial wrestler. Hart is mostly a mat wrestler. But both men can mix it up and have beaten all types of opponents.

From the opening bell of match one, Guerrero established a fast pace. To end Guerrero's offensive, Hart stepped onto the arena floor for a breather. That's when Guerrero



Hart tries to immobilize larger foes by working on their knees or ankles. He attempts to ground aerial specialists by the same method.

scored with a sensational flying bodypress that carried him over the top rope and struck Hart in the chest, carrying both men into the metal railing. Hart got the worst of that one, but Guerrero had unwittingly put himself into a bad position: on the floor with Hart. That's where Hart's strength came in, and he pounded Guerrero with forearms to the face that opened a cut above Guerrero's right eye.

Guerrero didn't seem to mind. With blood pouring down his face, he rolled back into the ring. As Hart was getting back in, Guerrero kicked him in the throat. It was a solid blow. Hart slumped over the ring apron and Guerrero came down with an elbow that opened a cut on the side of "The Hitman's" face. Hart crawled back into the ring. Guerrero climbed to the top rope and attempted his frog splash. Somehow, Hart moved

out of the way, Guerrero crashed to the mat, and Hart covered him for the pin.

Having suffered an unlucky break, Guerrero never recovered from the match one loss. His huracanrana wasn't enough to put away Hart in match two, and Bret recovered to score with a vertical suplex, then apply his sharpshooter for a submission victory. Hart won by sharpshooter again in match three, before Guerrero salvaged a victory in match four via a successful frog splash.

Guerrero had Hart on the run again in match five—both men were bloodied—and scored with four consecutive dropkicks. With Hart down, Guerrero climbed to the top rope for a moonsault ... and missed. Not that Hart got out of the way; Guerrero just missed, a rare event, and Hart easily covered him for the pin.

Hart wins the series, 4-1.

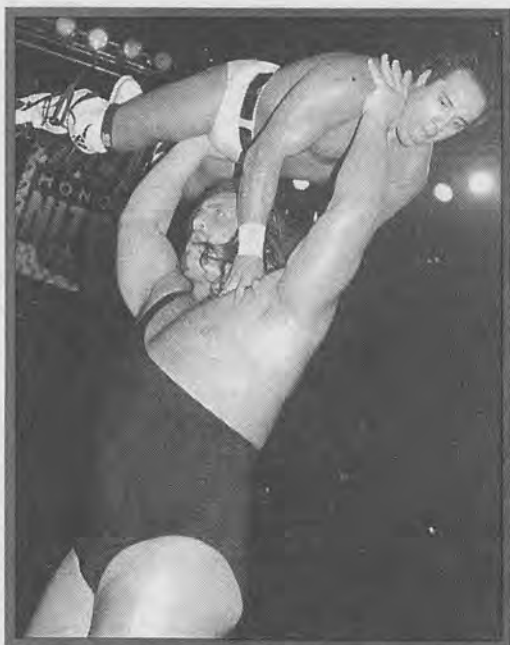


When Eddy Guerrero competes against men like Ultimo Dragon, a high-flying spectacle will result. Mat wrestlers such as Bret Hart offer quite a different challenge.



THE GIANT vs. STEVE AUSTIN

FIRST



The Giant relies on his size and power to dominate his opponents. His computer match with Steve Austin would be no different.

This is another contest that pits two men who were successful in last year's Computer Tournament. Austin lost to Kevin Nash in the quarterfinals and The Giant lost to Nash in the semifinals. The Giant is 7'4", 430 pounds, and wrestles in WCW. Austin is 6'2", 241 pounds and wrestles in the WWF. They are two of the toughest, most ruthless wrestlers alive and will do anything to win. The Giant is more than just a big man. He has talent, too. And Austin is one of the best all-around wrestlers in the world.

Austin likes to use the ropes, but knew that would be difficult against The Giant, who isn't exactly easy to catapult. The series would come down to whether Austin's kicks and

punches would have their intended effect on The Giant, who responds to kicks and punches the way a brick wall does to being struck by a hammer.

And another question: Could Austin's injured neck—which caused him to miss several months in 1997 and nearly forced him into retirement—withstand The Giant's choke-slam?

The Giant decided to find out in a hurry. Less than four minutes into match one, he pounded Austin's shoulders with a series of thunderous chops, then reached out for Austin's neck. Austin backed off, and The Giant only got a few fingers on Austin, but the message had been delivered: "Austin, you're gonna

have to watch your neck."

Things didn't go well for Austin in match one. His attempt at a leg takedown didn't budge The Giant. A sunset flip flopped. Austin pounded on The Giant's midsection, but his punches had no effect. The Giant laughed in his face, then doubled-over Austin with a knee to the midsection.

Things didn't go well for Austin in the entire series. The Giant finally scored with a choke-slam in the 12th minute of match one and dropped a knee to score the pin. Austin needed three minutes to get up.

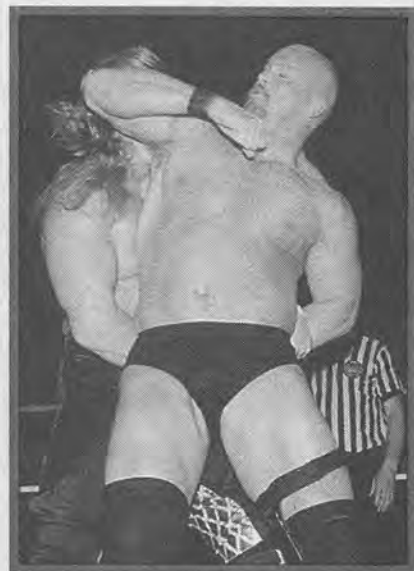
Austin managed to use his "Stone-Cold stunner" after 20 minutes of match two—he smartly wore down The Giant—and won to even

the series. But The Giant's choke-slam in the fifth minute of match three set up an early victory, and led to another win in match four. In match five, The Giant got overconfident and tried a dropkick, which missed by about three feet. He crashed to the mat, and Austin applied a sleeper for the pin.

It was a temporary setback for the big man. He started match six by pounding on Austin, then slamming him to the mat. Then he planted his big boot onto Austin's neck. Then, with one boot already across the neck, he placed the other boot on Austin's stomach, and now "Stone-Cold" was suffering under the pressure of 430 pounds.

A choke-slam finished him off—believe it or not—at 3:16.

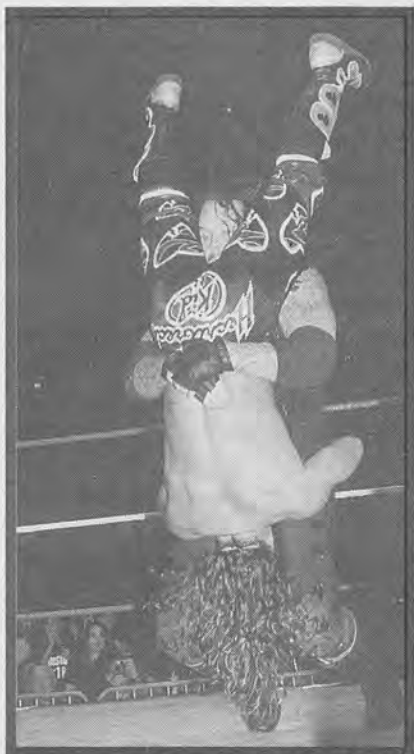
The Giant wins the series, 4-2.



Austin knows basic scientific wrestling, but often resorts to vicious elbow-smashes, punches, and kicks. This strategy didn't work well for him when he faced The Giant.

THE UNDERTAKER vs. CURT HENNIG

ROUND



Smaller and more agile opponents are always tough for The Undertaker. Yet even they are usually planted by his tombstone piledriver.

This was the question for the Undertaker-Curt Hennig series: Could Hennig, the smaller mat wrestler with tons of experience and smarts, overcome the size of the 6'9", 328-pound Undertaker?

We'd find out in one of the best first-round series.

The matches went about as we expected they would. The Undertaker is a notoriously slow starter who often doesn't show his best stuff until he's on the verge of defeat. Hennig likes to dictate the pace of a match. The problem for Hennig, however, was that The

Undertaker displayed incredible patience and refused to come to him. Hennig always had to go after The Undertaker. When Hennig didn't mount an offensive, there was nothing happening at all. Just two men standing in the middle of the ring, measuring each other.

Hennig tried to take down The Undertaker several times in the first 10 minutes of match one, but Undertaker was an immovable object. Hennig also discovered that his stamina was meaningless against The Undertaker, who expends so little energy in a match that he can last for 30 or 40 minutes. None of the matches lasted that long, but when Hennig took The Undertaker into the 20th minute of match one, he should have been in control of the match. He wasn't. And when The Undertaker decided to end it, he did, in the 22nd minute, when he effortlessly choke-slammed Hennig, then dropped an elbow for the pin.

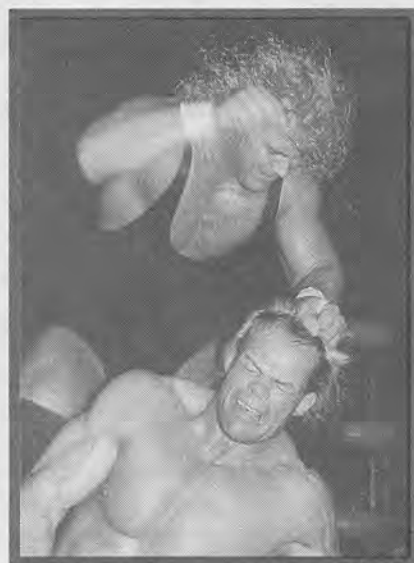
Trailing in the series, Hennig tried a different approach in match two and waited for The Undertaker. And waited. And waited. He kept waiting, then finally in the eighth minute, he went after The Undertaker's legs and tripped him to the mat. Hennig planted an elbow in The Undertaker's stomach, then launched an assault on his face. As The Undertaker covered up, Hennig dropped an elbow in his gut, then turned him over for a variation of the "sharpshooter." Shockingly, The Undertaker submitted.

The Undertaker won match three with a clothesline/tombstone piledriver combination. Hennig won

match four after a beautiful vertical suplex. The Undertaker won match five with a choke-slam, then a bodyslam. Hennig won match six with a fisherman's suplex.

The deciding match lasted 16 minutes. Hennig controlled the first 14 minutes. In the 15th minute, The Undertaker missed with a flying clothesline and crashed to the mat. Hennig decided to go for a figure-four leglock, but The Undertaker—now on his knees—grabbed him from behind, turned him around, and choke-slammed Hennig down on his knees. The effect of the blow tore through Hennig's knees, up his legs, and throughout his body. The Undertaker merely had to shove him to the mat, then cover him for the pin.

The Undertaker wins the series, 4-3.



Intensity and resiliency are two of Curt Hennig's best traits. He proved to be more intense than The Undertaker, but not quite as resilient.



KANE VS. KEVIN NASH

SECOND



Kane has made a point of targeting the biggest and the baddest. His Computer Tournament foe, Kevin Nash, certainly lived up to that billing.

Nash and Kane breezed through their first-round matches against much smaller opponents. Now they get to meet each other for the first time. Advantage: Nash. Although he has never faced Kane, he wrestled The Undertaker—Kane's supposed brother—several times in the WWF. At In Your House VI on February 18, 1996, Bret Hart defeated Nash—then known as Diesel—in a steel cage match when The Undertaker interfered. Six weeks later at WrestleMania XII, The Undertaker pinned Diesel. Nash left the WWF shortly afterward.

In this contest, Nash had the size advantage, but it didn't do him much good in the first two matches. Kane wrestled at a slow pace, attacking only when necessary and rarely when he wasn't attacked. It was an Undertaker-like game plan in which

Nash mostly countermoved and showed his best stuff when he got into trouble. With eight minutes gone in match one, Nash thought he had sufficiently weakened Kane to try a big foot, then maybe a power bomb. But Kane grabbed Nash's foot, twisted his leg, then pushed him over the top rope and to the arena floor. It was a marvelous display of strength.

Four minutes later, Nash and Kane exchanged a series of punches, then Nash kned Kane in the midsection. The shot had no effect. Kane responded by hammering down on Nash with forearms, flooring him with a clothesline, then covering him for the pin.

Kane won match two in a similar manner. He held off an all-out assault by Nash for 10 minutes, then won via a tombstone piledriver.

Desperate and facing defeat, Nash picked up the pace a little in match three and won after Kane missed with a flying clothesline. He evened the series in match four with a quick victory. This time, Nash scored with a series of thunderous clotheslines that floored Kane, then used his "jackknife" power bomb for the pin.

Nash worked over Kane's face in match five and tried to bloody

him, but Kane wouldn't bleed. Kane sent Nash flying over the top rope with a clothesline, then made the mistake of coming after him. Nash ran Kane into a metal post. Nash pulled a groggy Kane back into the ring, scored with a legdrop, then got the pin. And in match six, Kane allowed himself to endure too much punishment. With 13 minutes gone, Nash put Kane in a hold he doesn't use very often—a sleeper. Finally, Kane passed out, and Nash finished him off with a legdrop to win the series.

Kevin Nash wins the series, 4-2.



Nash can usually walk around the ring with his opponent draped over his shoulder. Kane was a bit too heavy for that.

SHAWN MICHAELS vs. ROB VAN DAM

ROUND

In a superb matchup of aerial artists, longtime superstar Shawn Michaels took on budding superstar Rob Van Dam in a series that promised plenty of action, plenty of high-risk maneuvers, and maybe a surprise or two. The surprise would come if Van Dam managed to win two matches—or even one match—against a much more wily opponent. A series victory would have been shocking.

But Michaels has a way of being a little too cocky against supposedly opponents he's favored against and he made the mistake of not taking Van Dam seriously in match one. In this series, Van Dam was playing the role previously played by The 1-2-3 Kid: The little guy, at 6', 227 pounds. The underdog. The man capable of taking advantage of his opponent's mistakes.

Michaels made a mistake in match one. His mistake was assuming that Van Dam, who took a terrible pounding during the first three minutes, would give up with out a fight. He didn't. Van Dam, with blood pouring down his forehead after Michaels delivered seven lefts and eight rights during the first two minutes, refused to give in. When Michaels prematurely went for his superkick finisher, Van Dam quickly stepped out of the way. Michaels crashed to the mat and Van Dam wasted no time going in for the kill. Rather than attempt the high-risk split-legged moonsault, he simply scored with a leg-drop, and covered Michaels for the pin.

But Michaels didn't give in easily, either. He kicked out at three, stared up at Van Dam in disbelief,



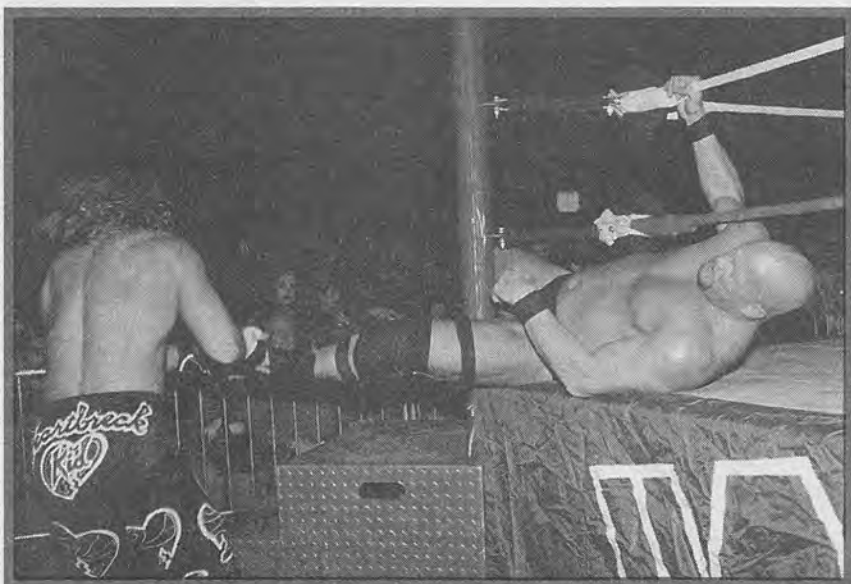
Van Dam knows how to legdrop a guy when he's down. Against Michaels, however, it was hard to tell if he was really down or not.

and rolled out of the ring.

It was a brilliant move by Michaels. A veteran's move. A champion's move. At that moment, he started taking Van Dam seriously and offered his best stuff: Dropkicks that were on target 95 percent of the time. Swift legdrops. Intelligent pacing. A sharp elbow here and there, and a clothesline for good measure. Michaels knew he could overpower him. Van Dam tried to show his best stuff, but it wasn't enough. With 14 minutes gone in match one, Van Dam got desperate and attempted a split-legged moonsault. He missed by five feet.

Twenty seconds later, Michaels covered Van Dam for the match one pinfall. The rest of the series resembled match one. Van Dam gave his best, but it wasn't enough.

Shawn Michaels wins the series, 4-0.



Shawn Michaels is not only an expert inside the ring, but also outside of it. Once Michaels overcame his own cockiness, he was able to use his superior savvy to outwit Rob Van Dam.



SHANE DOUGLAS vs. BRET HART

SECOND



Shane Douglas always finds himself brawling in ECW. When he wrestled Bret Hart in our computer tournament, however, his scientific skills were on full display.

ECW champion Shane Douglas upset Lex Luger in the first round. Former WWF World champion Bret Hart got past pesky Eddy Guerrero. Douglas faced another difficult test in the second round against yet another experienced and talented superstar. For Hart, this would be another difficult test against an underrated wrestler with the ability to beat him.

Match one was a lesson in pacing. It lasted 25 minutes, but at no time did either wrestler appear tired. Even in the final minute, when Douglas worked toward his victory, it never seemed as if Hart were ready to be pinned. From the start, it was clear this match would be won by one wrestler taking advantage of his opponent's mistake.

In this match, the mistake was made by Hart, who tried to clamp

his sharpshooter on his fallen—but barely shaken—opponent. Douglas reversed the sharpshooter into a figure-four leglock, then released the hold long enough to come down with an elbow into Bret's gut. He lifted Bret from the mat, executed a pretty belly-to-back suplex, and covered Hart for the pin.

Now the hunter was the hunted. The underdog had a 1-0 lead and Hart couldn't allow himself to fall behind 2-0. Douglas again tried to avoid Hart's early assault in match two, but Hart was relentless and stalked him into the corner. Hart can be a vicious wrestler, and he beat on Douglas, pounding his head into the turnbuckle, then exposing the turnbuckle and pounding Douglas again until blood poured from his mouth.

Douglas, enraged by the sight of his own blood, tried to mount an offensive, but Hart wouldn't give way. "The Hitman" floored Douglas with a clothesline. Then Hart rolled out of the ring, grabbed Douglas'

legs, and wrapped them around the ringpost for a figure-four. Douglas screamed out in pain, then Hart dragged him into the middle of the ring and applied the sharpshooter. Douglas endured for a minute, but finally he had to submit. The series was tied at 1-1.

Hart used his sharpshooter at 13:13 to win match three, again by submission. He won match four following a vertical suplex at 16:18 that seemingly rattled the bones in Douglas' body. Douglas came up big in match five, gallantly escaping from a sharpshooter at 11:20. He won with a belly-to-belly at 16:25.

But Hart, the old pro, was a master in match six and controlled the pace from start to finish. Douglas tried to brawl with Hart, but Hart decided he didn't want to brawl. Finally, after too many mistakes by Douglas, Hart used a vertical suplex to bring him down, then covered him for the pin.

Bret Hart defeats Shane Douglas, 4-2.



Hart grabs Goldust's legs so he can execute a figure-four around the metal turnpost. This move was also very effective against Douglas.

THE GIANT vs. THE UNDERTAKER

ROUND

Whatever size advantage The Giant held, The Undertaker could match in superior agility. Could our computer program actually determine a winner between these two? Would it overload our Pentium processor?

Match one was a huge test for our computer. The Giant chopped The Undertaker. The Undertaker laughed. The Undertaker chopped The Giant. The Giant laughed. Then they just stared at each other.

Suddenly, The Undertaker

grabbed The Giant's arm and began twisting it. He held on to The Giant's hand and climbed the turnbuckle. Then he started scaling the top rope. That's when The Giant yanked his arm back, forcing The Undertaker to fall onto the ropes—the hard way.

The Giant had been toying with him. The colossus pounded on The Undertaker's neck and shoulders. Then his big

right hand encompassed The Undertaker's throat. But wait! The Undertaker's cold hand wrapped around The Giant's esophagus. The Giant, however, had much more strength. Since he still wasn't able to execute a choke-slam, he opted for a DDT. It was a new move for The Giant, yet effective. He covered The Undertaker for the pin at 10:33.

The Undertaker lunged after The Giant at the opening bell of match two. He pummeled the behemoth with left and right jabs. A slugfest ensued. After several minutes of brawling, The Undertaker whipped The Giant across the ring and met him with a flying forearm that knocked him completely off balance. The Undertaker score the pin at 17:45.

During match three, The Giant attacked The Undertaker and mauled him in the corner. He gave "The Man From The Dark Side" no breathing space whatsoever. The Giant used headlocks and bear-hugs to wear his man down. He



The Undertaker stops Bret Hart in his tracks with a boot to the face. A chair would have been very handy for The Undertaker in his battle against The Giant.

threw The Undertaker into the ropes and caught him with a stunning dropkick. At 8:21, The Giant pinned The Undertaker and took the lead, 2-1.

The Undertaker worked on The Giant's ankles throughout match four, forcing him to submit to a figure-four leglock. With momentum on his side, The Undertaker defeated The Giant with a bone-rattling vertical suplex in match five. The Giant came back with a piledriver to win match six.

In all-important match seven, The Undertaker worked on The Giant's legs. He used leglocks, tied them in the ropes, and sometimes just pounced on top of them—anything to keep The Giant immobilized. The Giant, in desperation, grabbed the front of The Undertaker's trunks, catapulting him out of the ring. The 'Taker hit his head on the ring apron. He groggily crawled back into the ring, only to be met with a massive Giant clothesline. A Giant pin followed at 18:57.

The Giant wins the series, 4-3.



The Giant may be able to choke-slam Konnan with ease, but doing the same to The Undertaker is an entirely different matter. In their computer series, it was impossible.



KEVIN NASH vs. SHAWN MICHAELS

SEMIF



Nash's strategy against Michaels was similar to what he recently used against Dallas Page. Yes, that meant choking, punching, and other roughhouse tactics.

Yes, we have seen this match before. Many times before, in the WWF. Michaels and Diesel started out as friends, then best friends, then tag team partners. Twice, they won the WWF World tag team title. But at WrestleMania XI, Diesel used his "jackknife" power bomb to pin Michaels in 1995's Match of the Year. Then they became friends again. Then enemies again. And in last year's Computer Tournament, Nash defeated Michaels for the championship.

The trademark of previous Nash-Michaels meetings: Nash, the brawler, often tried to show off his scientific ability, while Michaels, the aerial/scientific wrestler, often tried to show off his brawling ability.

Neither man would let the other one-up him. But in this computer series, Nash and Michaels stuck to their strengths. Nash brawled. Michaels wrestled.

Michaels was the better man in match one. He controlled the pace of the match and won at 15:32 with two dropkicks and a superkick. Nash won match two, but he paid the price when Michaels applied a figure-four for two minutes with eight minutes gone. Nash wouldn't submit, but he limped through the rest of the match and finally won on a desperation move: a big foot to Michaels' throat, then a power bomb.

A fast-paced match three went to Michaels in 9:18. Nash won match four when he clamped a Boston crab on Michaels for three minutes, then turned him over for the pin. Match five turned out to be the most important match of the series. Nash dominated the early going and punished Michaels with five bodyslams to the mat, but Michaels kicked out Nash's leg. Then the two battled on the mat. Nash got up and planted his foot in Michaels' throat. Michaels, gasping for air, managed to reach the ropes and force a break.

With 12 minutes gone, Michaels missed with a dropkick and crashed to the mat, where he held his knee in pain. Now both men were wrestling with injured knees and Nash tried to take advantage by turning over Michaels and bending his knee backward. But

Michaels wouldn't relent and made the move of the series: He kicked Nash's injured leg from underneath him again and slapped on a figure-four leglock. Nash submitted at 15:33.

Nash won match six by using a "jackknife" power bomb, but the defending champion went down to defeat in a 20-minute classic in the deciding match. There were 14 two-counts, seven by each man, and finally a three-count when Nash backed into a Michaels superkick. Michaels scored the pin at 20:55 and reached the finals. He also avenged himself for his loss of the Computer Tournament crown to Nash last year.

Shawn Michaels wins the series, 4-3.



Shawn Michaels didn't choose to use headlocks on Kevin Nash. He used dropkicks and flying forearms to wear down the big man.

BRET HART vs. THE GIANT

INALS

We figured the winner of this series would be the wrestler who could control the tempo. The Giant is usually the favorite in short matches. Bret Hart had the edge in long matches. That's how it played out.

Going into the match, office oddsmakers gave the nod to The Giant. After all, The Giant had defeated Hart, 4-2, in last year's quarterfinals, leaving him unconscious in the ring after their final bout.

True to form, The Giant was a menacing figure at the start of the first match and pounded Hart's neck and shoulders with forearms, elbows, and chops. Hart, rather than fight back with kicks and punches—which would have played into The Giant's hands—tried to avoid The Giant's clutches. He did so by moving smartly, swiftly, and forcing The

Giant to chase him. This tired The Giant, who after eight minutes was breathing heavily. His punches were less effective.

The Giant clamped a nerve hold onto the top of Hart's left shoulder and squeezed, but Hart ducked out of it. With 12 minutes gone, The Giant was a spent wrestler, and with 15 minutes gone, Bret took down The Giant with chops to the chest, then applied his "sharpshooter." The Giant submitted.

After his first match defeat, The Giant was sure how to go about dealing with Hart's intelligence and technical skill. But he made a mistake by straying away from his own strengths. The Giant missed with a dropkick in the second minute and crashed to the mat.

Hart was seconds away from a quick win, but The Giant rolled away from an elbowdrop. Then The Giant stood up and kicked Hart solidly in the midsection. Hart bent over in pain, and The Giant pounded on his back for over three minutes. With Hart down on the mat, The Giant easily lifted him by the throat, then dropped him to the mat for the pin.

Now The Giant had the psychological advantage, but the psychological advantage would prove to be meaningless in this series. It meant overconfidence. The Giant reverted to his match one game plan and wore himself out again. Hart won via a bulldog at 14:53. The Giant won with another choke-slam in match



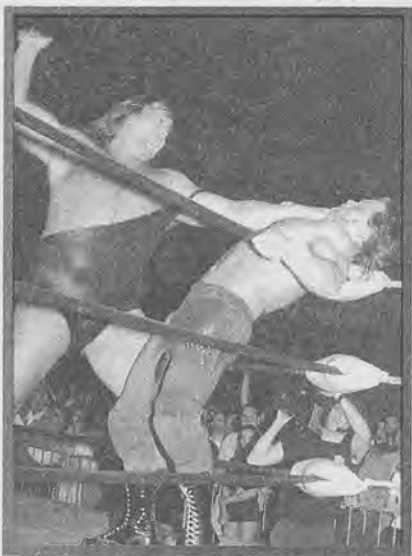
Bret Hart would have jumped at the opportunity to use the steel steps or the security railing against The Giant outside the ring. But The Giant was too smart to be lured into that trap.

four, then took a 3-2 lead when he nearly crippled Hart with a power bomb in match five.

Again, the psychological advantage meant nothing ... Hart wore down The Giant for 20 minutes in match six and forced him to submit to a "sharpshooter." The Giant had three two-counts in the first five minutes of match seven. Hart rolled out of the third two-count, then caught The Giant with a poke to the eyes. Enraged, The Giant chased after Hart, but tripped over his feet and landed throat-first on the top rope.

Hart dragged him backward, then used the cornerpost to apply a figure-four. The referee broke the hold, so Bret turned it into a "sharpshooter" in the center of the ring. Instead of waiting for the submission, he turned over The Giant and dropped an elbow onto his face. He got the pin at 7:38.

Bret Hart wins the series, 4-3.



The Giant lowers the boom on Chris Benoit. Hart is similar to Benoit in terms of size, strength, and style. But Hart's cunning allowed him to be more successful.



BRET HART vs. SHAWN MICHAELS

FINALS

At WrestleMania XII on March 31, 1996, Shawn Michaels defeated Bret Hart for the WWF World title in a match that will never be forgotten. It was an "Iron Man" match in which the wrestler who scored the most pins in 60 minutes would be declared the winner. After 60 minutes of action, however, neither wrestler had a pin. Hart, the reigning WWF World champion, thought he had retained the title via a draw, but overtime was ordered, and Michaels pinned Hart 1:52 later for the belt.

Hart vs. Michaels has been

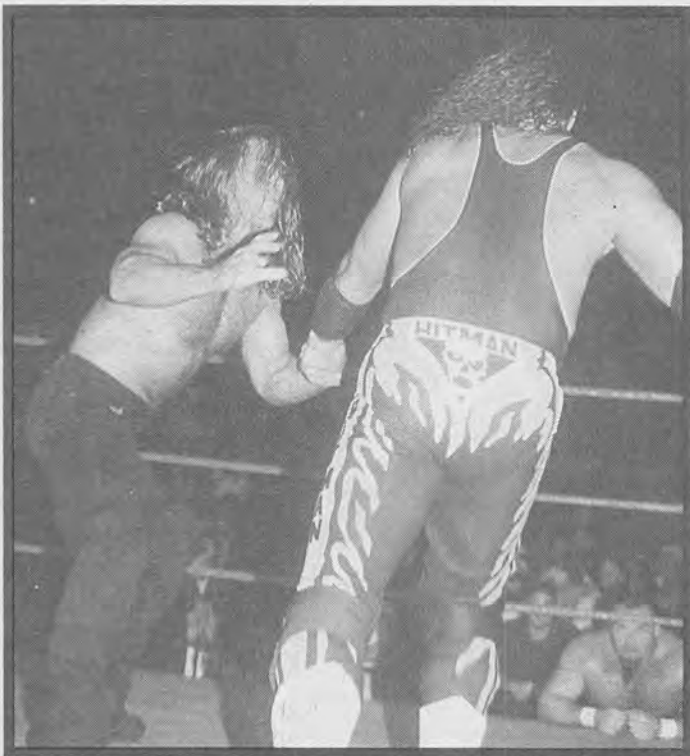
wrestling's classic feud of the 1990s. They avoided each other for a year, then feuded through the middle of 1997. At Survivor Series '97, Michaels captured his third WWF World title when he used Bret's move, the "sharp-shooter," to score what could be the most controversial victory in wrestling history. Shortly thereafter, Hart defected to WCW.

The Hart-Michaels feud is over, at least for now. But it lived on in our Computer Tournament when these two outstanding wrestlers met in a best-of-seven series for the championship. It was

Michaels' third consecutive trip to the finals. Last year, he lost to Kevin Nash.

Match 1: These familiar foes wasted no time tearing into each other as Hart pounded Michaels with forearms and "The Heart-break Kid" responded with a knee to the groin. The match quickly degenerated into a brawl with both men forgetting their technical skills and tearing into each other like the bitter enemies they are. Michaels worked on Hart's bad left knee while Bret punished Shawn's back whenever he had the

(Continued on page 47)

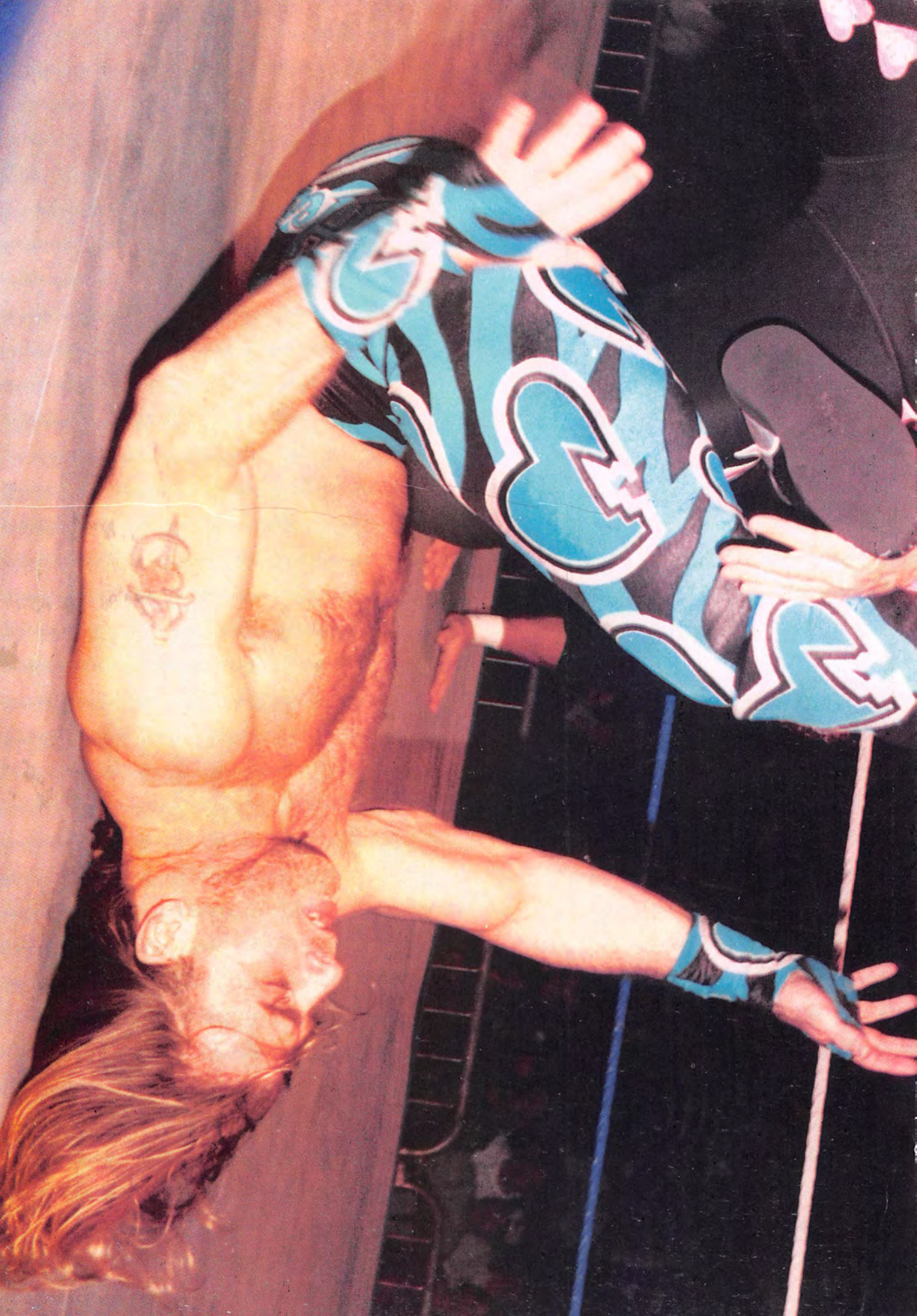


The confrontations between Shawn Michaels and Bret Hart are now part of wrestling legend, whether those encounters have been impromptu matches (above) or sanctioned donnybrooks (left). Their computer bouts were just as wild.

A full-page photograph of professional wrestler Shawn Michaels. He is shirtless, showing his muscular physique and a tattoo on his left shoulder. He has long, wavy brown hair and is looking over his shoulder towards the camera. His right arm is raised, pointing his index finger upwards. He is wearing blue and black patterned wristbands and matching blue and black patterned trunks. The background is a dark, stylized arena with bright, colorful light streaks and several large, glowing, iridescent spheres.

SHAWN MICHAELS

Computer
Tournament
'98 Finalist





Computer Tournament '98

ACTION CLOSEUP

It's almost time to panic for Shawn Michaels when Bret Hart starts to wrap him up in that "sharpshooter" of his. But then we all remember what happened the last time *Shawn* locked *Bret* in the "sharpshooter." That was one ugly night in Montreal last November. In any case, when Bret gets this painful hold cinched on tight in the middle of the ring, it's tough to counter. And since there is no outside interference permitted in our tournament ... well, Shawn, sorry, but it just wasn't your computer year.



BRET HART

Computer
Tournament
'98 Finalist



chance. After 10 minutes, Michaels was clutching his back in pain, while Hart was noticeably limping. Three minutes later, Shawn scored with his first dropkick of the match, but he missed with his second and crashed to the mat. Hart scored with an elbowdrop, then finally clamped on his "sharpshooter," and Michaels submitted.

Match 2: More of the same, only more violent. For 15 minutes, it seemed as if Hart and Michaels were more interested in hurting each other than beating each other. Michaels scored with several below-the-belt kicks, doubling over Hart, then lifted him for a piledriver. Hart couldn't escape and felt the violent impact of head against mat. Michaels scored the pin.

Match 3: Hart is bloodied early, but battles on. Michaels missed with a dropkick, but scores with the second. This momentarily stuns Hart, but Bret keeps coming at him. A vertical suplex, then a belly-to-back suplex, sets up a pinfall for Hart at 11:36.

Match 4: The longest match of the tournament lasts 42 minutes and features 24 two-counts, 14 by Hart and 10 by Michaels. But Michaels gets the most important cover: a three-count after a spectacular superkick.

Michaels catches a breather by cinching a front chancery on Hart (above), but respites are brief when these two collide. Grabbing each other's hair and dishing out punishment are more their forte (right).

Match 5: Michaels escapes a "sharpshooter" at 12:11. Hart avoids a superkick at 14:22. Michaels gets caught in a "sharpshooter" again at 17:00, but escapes by reaching the ropes. Hart pulls him away from the ropes, then the enemies exchange punches on the mat. Michaels gets up and connects with a leg-drop, but Bret rolls out at two. The two men get up and catapult off the ropes. Michaels leapfrogs over Hart, who quickly turns and scores with a kick to Michaels' face. The pin comes three seconds later.

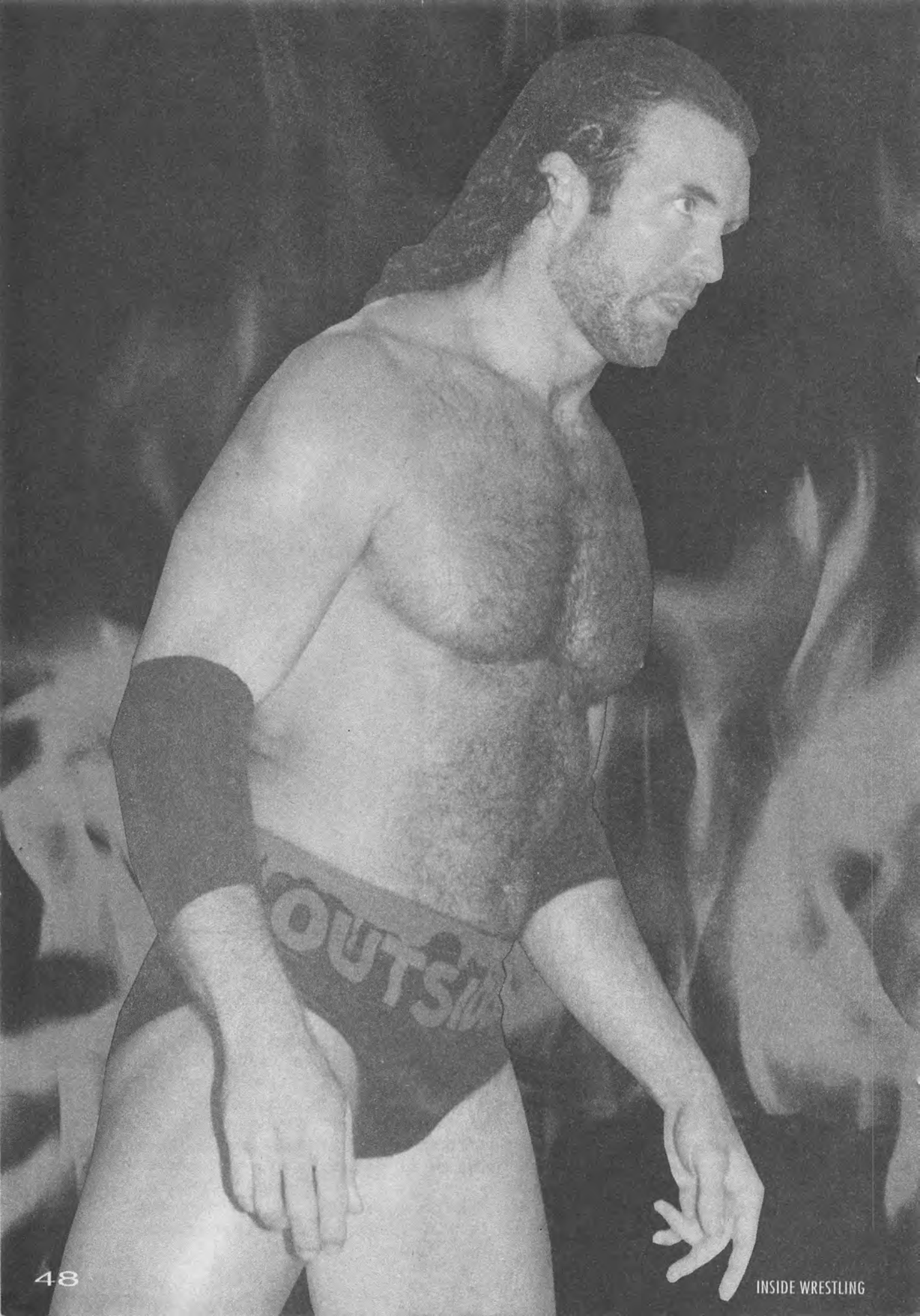
Match 6: Michaels turns the tables on Hart and wins by reversing Bret's "sharpshooter" into one of his own.

Match 7: Shocking. And shockingly quick. Michaels comes out



strong and hits a few dropkicks in the opening minute. But, on a third attempt, twists his left ankle on landing. Hart quickly seizes the opportunity and works on the injured leg, then grabs Michaels' bad ankle and twists. Michaels screams out in pain, but Hart keeps twisting. Michaels can't take anymore. He submits at 3:14 and Hart is declared the 1998 *Inside Wrestling* Computer Tournament champion.

Bret Hart wins the series, 4-3.



SCOTT HALL EMERGES FROM HIS OWN PRIVATE HELL

When Scott Hall suffered an upset loss at the hands of Chris Jericho, he considered it one of the worst losses of his career. But, after a half-dozen sparring sessions with a mystery partner, Hall was ready to get back to basics

By Dan Murphy

WILL SCOTT HALL ever learn? Too many times, Hall has let his arrogance get the better of him. No one will soon forget how Syxx, then known as The 1-2-3 Kid, became an overnight sensation when he scored an upset victory over Hall on *WWF Monday Night Raw* in May 1993. And it was just a few months ago that Hector Garza pinned Hall in a shocker on *WCW Monday Nitro*.

The hulking 6'8", 290-pound Hall was humiliated by these losses to much smaller foes. Both times, though, he rebounded with convincing victories over the men who upset him.

But Chris Jericho was different. When Jericho managed to put Hall down for a three-count on *Nitro* in November, the big man didn't take the loss very well. Some say he considered it one of the worst of his career.

Hall couldn't stand the thought of yet another loss to a cruiserweight. In fact, *INSIDE WRESTLING* has learned Hall went so far as to quietly hire a special sparring partner for his rematch against Jericho. This cruiserweight, who has remained anonymous, even mimicked Jericho's aerial moves and solid mat style. Hall, you see, left nothing to chance.

Why did Hall, who usually brims with confidence, take this loss so seriously? To answer this question, we tracked down Hall's mystery sparring partner. He reluctantly agreed to answer certain questions if we agreed to keep his identity a secret. After all, he is vying for a full-time position with the NWO.

"For the better part of the past two years, Scott has primarily been a tag team wrestler," the anonymous source explained. "He loved teaming with Kevin Nash and all, but Scott still thinks of himself as primarily a singles wrestler. After being away from



Scott Hall made a mistake by attempting to use the "Outsiders' Edge" too early in his first match with Chris Jericho (left). Jericho then surprised a flustered Hall by rolling him into a small package for the upset victory (above). Hall knew he had to figure out a way to counteract smaller opponents.

singles matches that long, you have a tendency to tire out more quickly because you're accustomed to tagging out.

"Scott's a big guy, and he carries a lot of weight in the ring. A lighter, more streamlined wrestler can get a burst of energy and catch a bigger guy flat-footed if he gets sloppy due to fatigue. That's exactly what happened to Scott against Jericho the first time."

But shouldn't a man of Hall's size be able to brawl his way to a quick victory over a competitor he outweighs by nearly 70 pounds?

"He certainly could, but that's not what Scott was after," the source said. "In the WWF, Scott was Intercontinental champion four times. He wants a singles belt around his waist soon. He needed to get back in the habit of pacing himself against faster opponents—guys just like Jericho. That's why he hired me."

Hall contacted the sparring partner the morning after his loss to Jericho. For six days, the pair worked in the ring for nearly two hours each morning. It was

all work for Hall, who was determined to keep up with his smaller opponent. In fact, he began looking a lot like the Scott Hall of three years ago, who—as Razor Ramon—was one of the most respected singles wrestlers in the world.

"For about an hour before each session, I watched tapes of Jericho in action," the mystery man said. "I studied how he would plant his feet before throwing a dropkick and how he catapulted himself from the top rope. Whenever Jericho had an oppo-



In the rematch, it was Jericho who became frustrated. Hall was able to ground him almost every time he tried to take to the air. Jericho even resorted to kicking Hall.



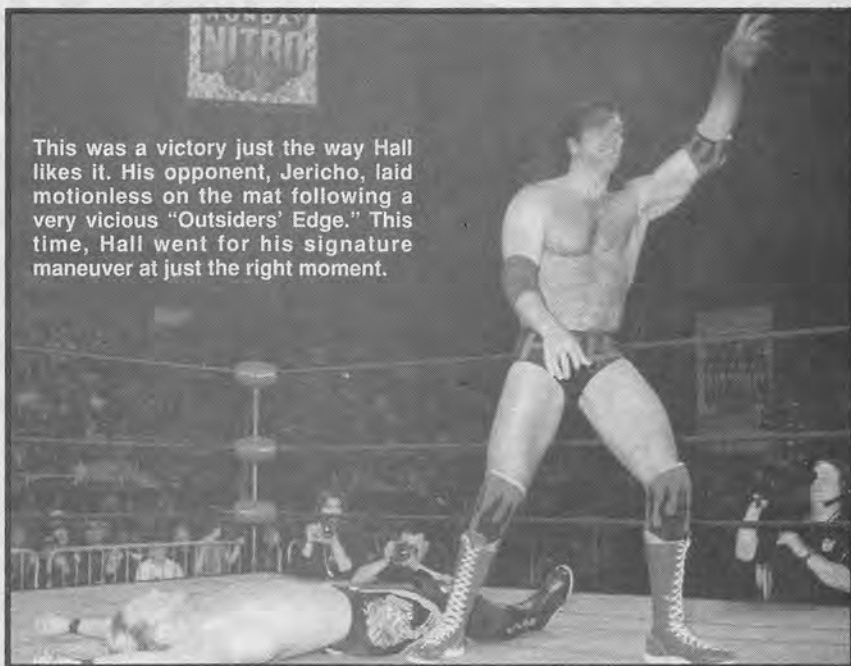
Hall paced himself much better in the rematch. Late in the contest, he had more than enough energy to catch Jericho in his famous fallaway slam.

nent helpless in a corner, I watched to see if he would go for a quick cradle or if he'd try to snap-mare his opponent down for a vertical press. I even tried to wear my hair in the same style as his. I did everything I could to become Jericho because that's what Scott wanted."

Another locker room source saw something else.

"At first, I could have sworn that Hall was working out with Shawn Michaels," said a Luchadore who caught a glimpse of one of the training sessions. "Of course, I got a better look at his face and saw that it wasn't Michaels, but he did seem to wrestle a lot like him."

That shouldn't be much of a surprise. Hall and Michaels had a tumultuous relationship in the WWF, trading wins and the I-C title. The two seemed very evenly matched despite Hall's size advantage. Today, Michaels is WWF World champion, while Hall isn't doing much more than acting as a thug for the NWO. On his way to establishing himself as a singles threat in WCW, Hall wasn't thrilled to see another blond high-flyer cross his path.



This was a victory just the way Hall likes it. His opponent, Jericho, laid motionless on the mat following a very vicious "Outsiders' Edge." This time, Hall went for his signature maneuver at just the right moment.

When Hall finally got another shot at Jericho, it wasn't pretty. The training sessions had definitely borne fruit. Remaining focused, Hall was able to ground Jericho's aerial attack. He gave Jericho very few openings and wrestled in a slow, methodical style. He laid his weight on Jericho whenever possible and was sure to wear the youngster down before attempting his finishing maneuver. Then Hall destroyed "Lion Heart" with a particularly devastating "Outsiders' Edge." A familiar smirk

returned to Hall's face.

"He knew what I was going to do before I did!" Jericho was overheard remarking in the locker room after the match as he held an ice pack against the back of his head. "It's hard to believe that was the same guy I beat that last time!"

"That should be enough to shut all you reporters up," Kevin Nash crowed to the members of the press who were standing near the NWO locker room entrance. "I guess you boys are going to have to can the special 'Jericho Defeats The NWO' issue now, aren't you? My main man, Scott Hall, made you come up

with a new headline before the ink had even dried on the old one. How 'bout 'Hall And The NWO: Still Too Sweet!'"

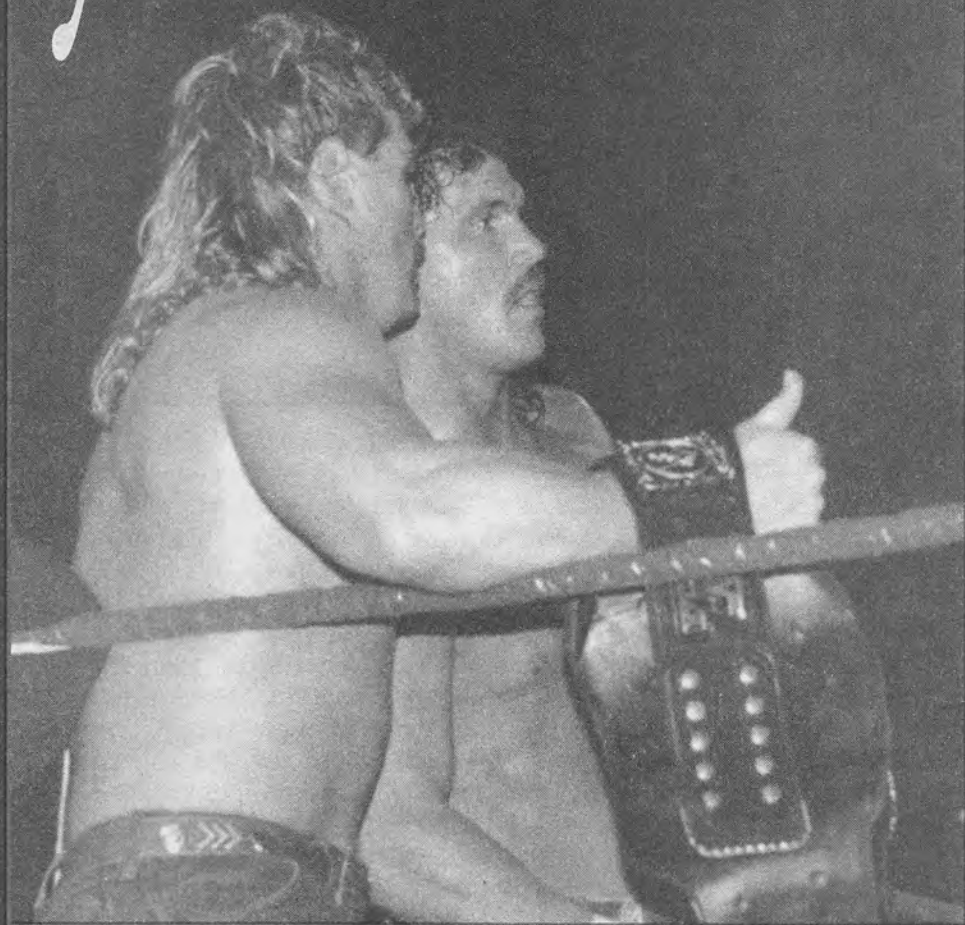
The mystery sparring partner watched the match with pride. "I did my job well," he commented. "Scott's more than capable of returning to winning style on his own."

Hall would be the first to squelch any notion that he has adapted a "new and improved" style. But he, more than anyone else, was relieved to see the old Scott Hall again. □

B.A. BILLY GUNN & JESSE JAMES' BIG BLUNDER!

They've Created The Team That Will Destroy Them!

Billy Gunn and Jesse James may be enjoying the high-life as WWF tag team champs, but two other spurned wrestlers await the moment when they can exact revenge upon their former partners. Look out Billy and Jesse, Bart Gunn and Jeff Jarrett are coming your way!

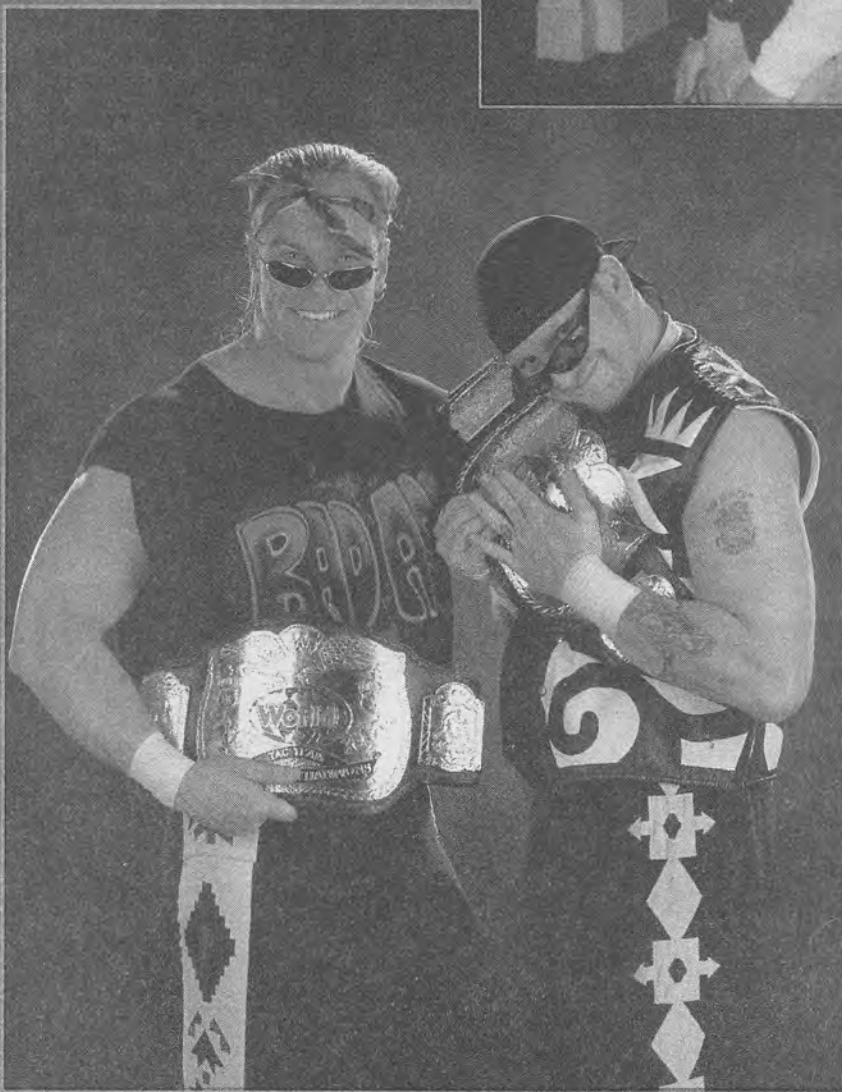


By Bryan Ethier

SOME PARTNERSHIPS are born from shattered relationships; some are created out of convenience; many are doomed from the start.

Very few fit into all three categories. But if you look closely at WWF World tag team champions Billy Gunn and "Road Dog" Jesse James you'll see that their partnership most certainly does.

Both men came from successful but strained tandems. Individually, they haven't enjoyed a



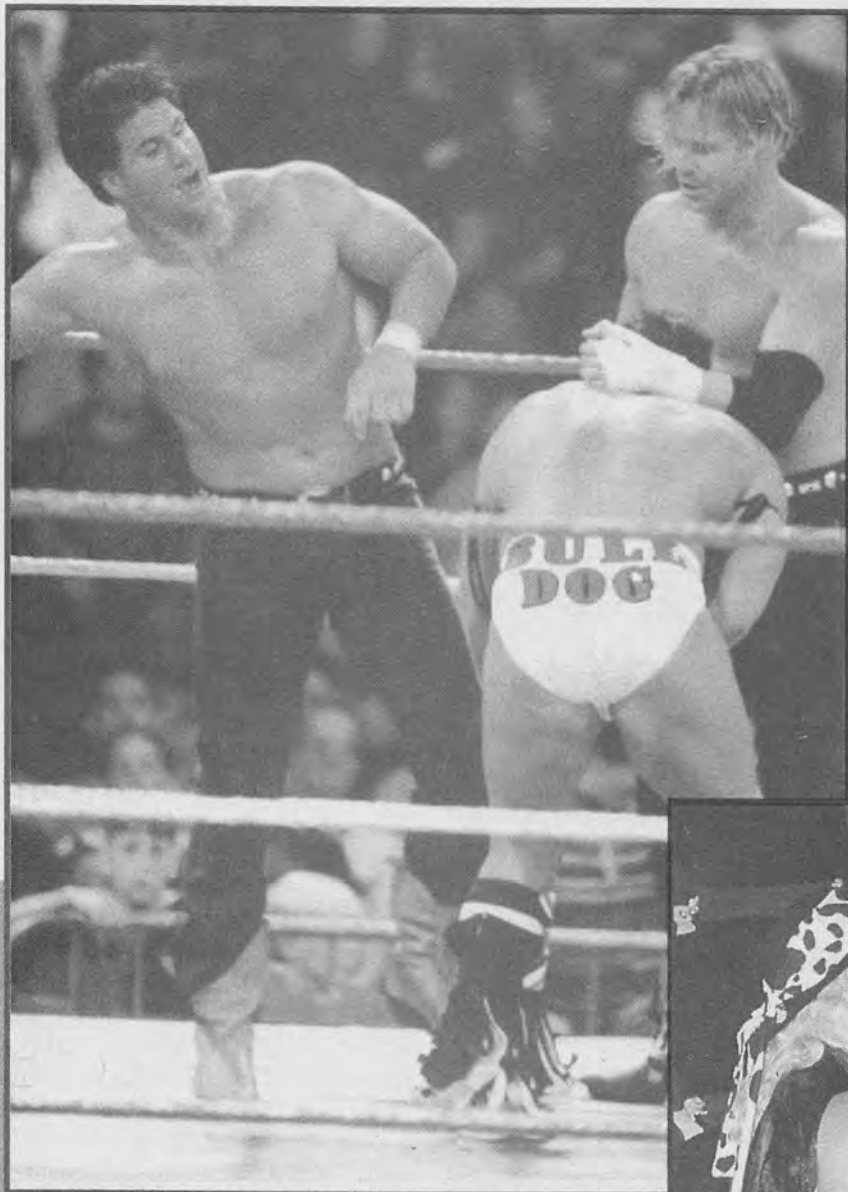
Billy Gunn and Jesse James have always favored tag team competition. The Smokin' Gunns, Billy and brother Bart (opposite page, left), were two-time WWF champs. James (known as the Roadie then) and Jeff Jarrett (top right) were great together while their partnership lasted. Now the Billy-Jesse tandem (above) may be doomed.

fraction of the success that tag team wrestling has brought them. And the chain of events that resulted in their rise to the top might also be the force that sends them crashing down.

Jesse James, once known as The Roadie, used to work side-by-side with Jeff Jarrett. The two were involved in one of the most blatant ripoffs in music history since Milli Vanilli. Roadie, you may recall, actually laid down the vocals to the hit song "With My Baby Tonight." But Jarrett not only took credit for the song, he lip-synched the track at numerous live shows. The underhanded scheme not only cost them their friendship eventually, but it also prevented them from becoming an elite WWF tag team.

Billy Gunn and his brother Bart twice captured the WWF World tag team belts. But they ended up as a modern-day version of Cain and Able—brothers who were simply too jealous of each other. Bart was always the more popular of the two, and that forever irritated Billy. The brothers haven't talked since Bart left the WWF last year.

From this rubble emerged the team of Billy Gunn and "Road



made a triumphant return to the WWF.

"You can't ever say for sure who will be out there to make life difficult for Billy Gunn and my dear friend Jesse James," he added sarcastically. With Jarrett already back, and Bart Gunn slated to make a less-trumpeted return, Armageddon might come sooner than Billy and Jesse realize.

"Word going around town is that Jarrett and Bart Gunn are ready to tie Billy Gunn and Jesse James into a one huge knot," opined Jerry Lawler. "I can't wait to see Jeff back kicking some butt. And I know a lot of people don't like that Billy Gunn."

Lawler, a voice of neither authority nor reason, might be overstating the case, but there is truth to "The King's" proclamation. Gunn and James have gone to

Dog" Jesse James—shunned pariahs looking to latch on with anyone who would have them. Two wrestlers who have done very little on their own.

Yet somehow their pairing has catapulted them to the throne of WWF tag team competition. But how long do the unlikely champions figure to keep the tag team belts?

With the dissolution of the Owen Hart/Davey Boy Smith tandem, and the inconsistency of the LOD, there really is no end to their reign in sight.

"I wouldn't be so sure of that," cautioned Jarrett, who recently

The Gunns got to be very good at double-teaming enemies when they were still together (above), but like James and Jarrett (right), they soon grew tired of dealing with each other's egos.





Getting to the top was not that tough for Gunn and James, who beat The Legion of Doom for the belts. But staying there has been surprisingly easy. They had better not get too cocky, however.

For now, it is believed they plan to work as a team with just a handshake agreement between them. Should they accomplish their goals, then they would sit down and discuss a long-term agreement.

And what would be the primary goal of a Bart Gunn/Jeff Jarrett partnership?

"Suffice to say, winning the tag team title would be part of the equation," said WWF broadcaster

Michael Cole. "But I think these guys would be looking more to destroy Billy Gunn and the 'Road Dog.' Then they could worry about taking over as the WWF's top tag team."

In a federation ridiculously bereft of credible tag teams, Billy Gunn and Jesse James may have unintentionally manufactured their toughest opponents. They have rekindled a fire in the bellies of two men who don't like the taste of treachery. ■

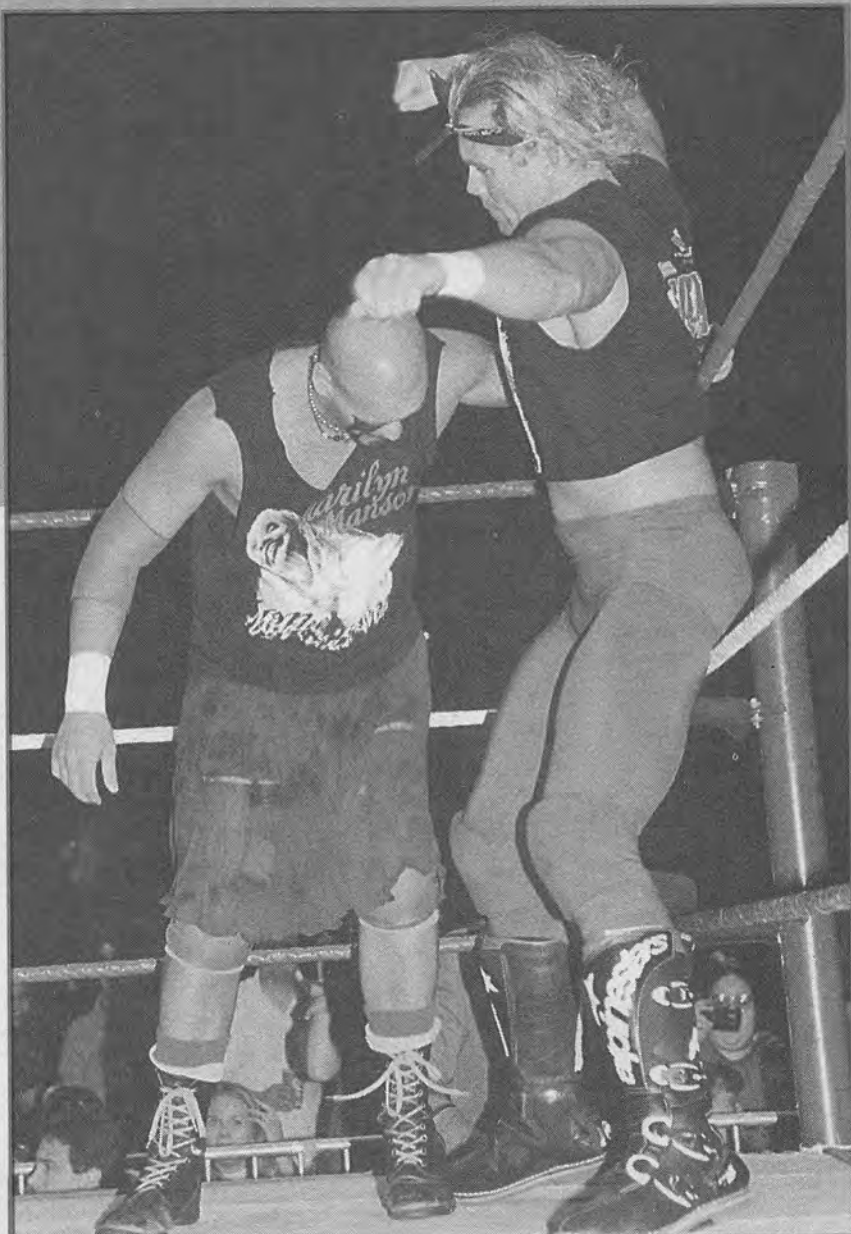
great lengths to ridicule their former partners. Meanwhile, Jarrett has adopted a new no-nonsense approach. He has dropped the "Double-J" moniker. His demeanor is more restrained, his words more forceful. Jarrett is on a mission to gain vindication from James.

"From what I hear, Jeff Jarrett would like to insert a microphone into Jesse James' voice box," says WWF commentator Jim Ross. "He told me his job would not be complete until he rode his ex-partner out of the WWF."

Bart Gunn, according to sources close to him, has also made it a point to vilify his brother whenever possible. Will we see blood spilled between them?

Maybe very soon, according to sources close to the scene. All the benchmarks of a new tag team—and a resultant bitter rivalry—are in place. Jarrett and Bart Gunn were spotted working out together in gyms three times in December alone.

"Just talkin' about some things and seein' where they go," said Jarrett. "That's all there is to this right now."



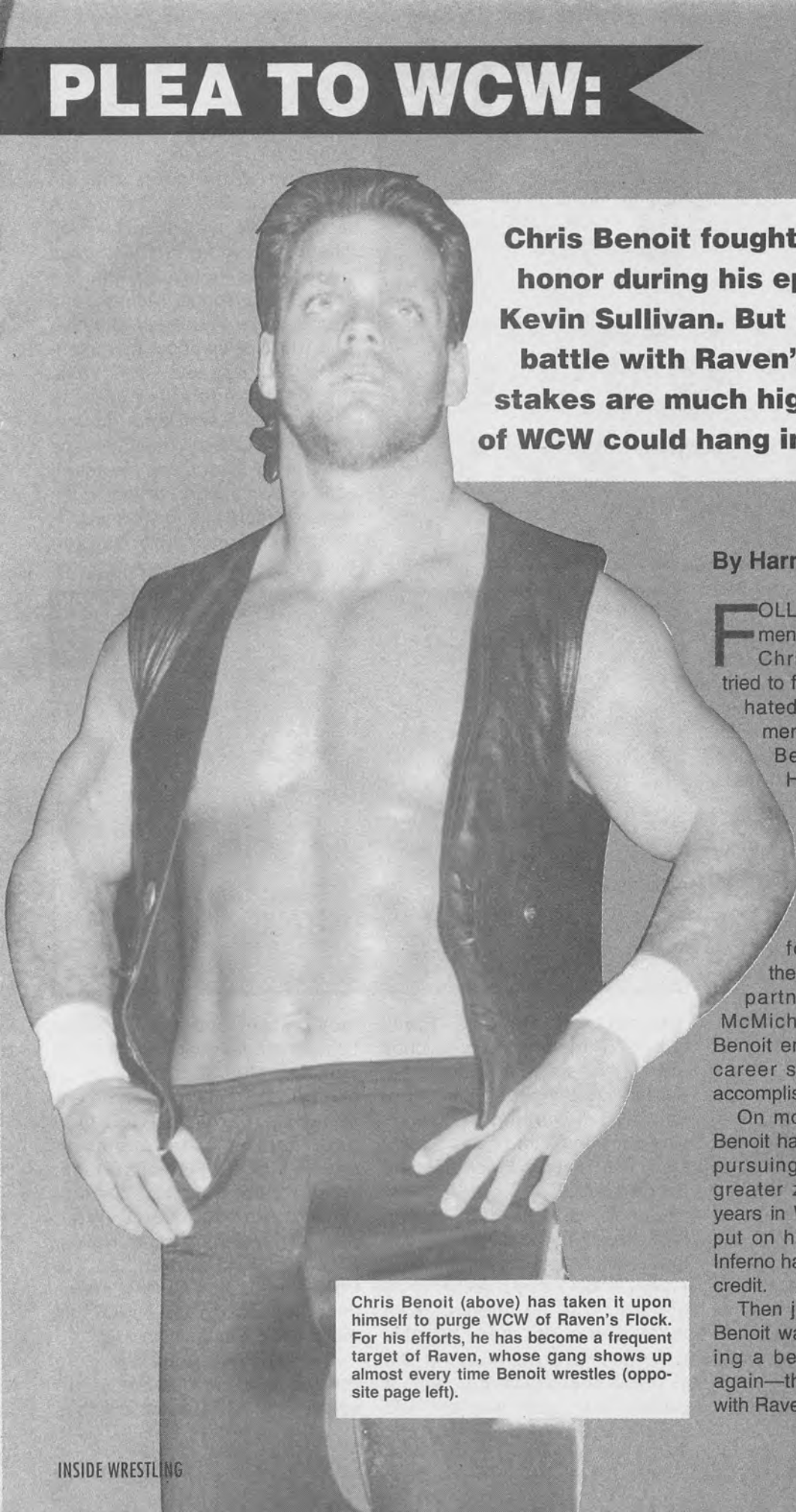
The WWF champs have handled every team the federation has had to offer, including The Headbangers, but sources say that Jeff Jarrett and Bart Gunn are seriously committed to toppling—and humiliating—their former partners.

CHRIS BENOIT'S URGENT

"Don't Let Raven's
Flock Become the
Next NWO!"



PLEA TO WCW:

A black and white photograph of Chris Benoit. He is shirtless, wearing a dark leather vest that is open at the front. He has a goatee and is looking upwards and slightly to the left. His hands are on his hips, and he is wearing white wristbands on both wrists. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Chris Benoit fought for personal honor during his epic war with Kevin Sullivan. But in his current battle with Raven's Flock, the stakes are much higher. The fate of WCW could hang in the balance

By Harry Burkett

FOLLOWING THE disbandment of the Four Horsemen, Chris Benoit desperately tried to find a niche in WCW. He hated parting ways with his mentor, Ric Flair, but even Benoit knew that the Horsemen's glory days were over.

At first, Benoit tried to get back in the title chase. He had been embroiled in a brutal feud with Kevin Sullivan for more than a year, then had been a regular tag partner of Flair, Steve McMichael, and Jeff Jarrett. Benoit enjoyed success, but his career still lacked a crowning accomplishment.

On more than one occasion, Benoit has voiced regret over not pursuing a championship with greater zeal. After almost four years in WCW, he has no title to put on his resume. Even Disco Inferno has two TV title wins to his credit.

Then just when it seemed that Benoit was rededicated to pursuing a belt, he got sidetracked again—this time in a crazy feud with Raven's Flock.

Chris Benoit (above) has taken it upon himself to purge WCW of Raven's Flock. For his efforts, he has become a frequent target of Raven, whose gang shows up almost every time Benoit wrestles (opposite page left).



Perry Saturn actually wrestled Billy Kidman in his first WCW match (above). Now Sick Boy, Hammer, Lodi, Scotty Riggs, Kidman, and Saturn sit together at WCW events (right). Will Benoit be joining them soon?

"I don't know why I get involved in these things," lamented Benoit. "It began when Raven started criticizing me, both professionally and personally. As a competitor, I'm used to hearing that kind of badmouthing all the time. But this was different. Raven was making me a target."

Listening to Raven, though, one would think that Benoit had started the conflict. But it was Raven who sent one man after another to face Benoit: Kidman, Lodi, Saturn, Hammer, the list goes on.

Exactly how much of a long-term threat Raven's group is to WCW remains to be seen, but comparisons have already been made between Raven's Flock and the now-defunct Dungeon of Doom that terrorized WCW in the mid-'90s. Benoit, however, makes an even more dramatic assertion. "I know a lot of wrestlers are just scratching their heads and laughing at how delusional Raven and his thugs are. But just look at the numbers. There are, what, seven

that makes these men even more dangerous.

But Benoit is not listening to those who criticize him. "Everybody is telling me that I'm wasting my time with Raven and his Flock," said Benoit. "I think the rest of WCW had better wake up. These are some talented guys who have been infected with poison. Saturn, Riggs, Kidman, and Hammer are first-class athletes. And who knows about the potential of Sick Boy and Lodi? Yeah, these guys seem like aimless sheep when Raven's not around. But I've wrestled Kidman several times in my career, and his adrenaline goes through the roof when Raven is there calling the shots."

At least one other person shares Benoit's concern. "People

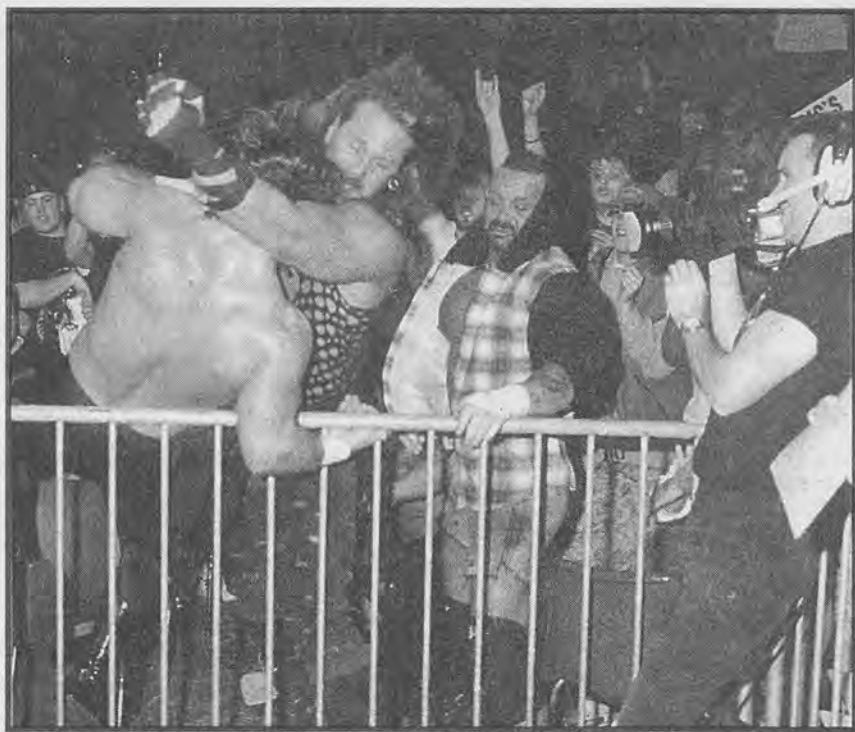


members of Raven's Flock already? I'm sure more psychos are on their way. I'm trying to put out this fire before it burns out of control. I'm warning everybody who's making light of this bunch: Don't let Raven's Flock become the next NWO!"

Benoit could be right. Raven has already put together a group that is almost as big as the New World Order. Every member is an outsider with no allegiance to WCW. But unlike the NWO, this group seems uninterested in title victories and political power. It exists only to cause mayhem. And

may snicker and say Benoit is being melodramatic," said WCW commentator Scott Hudson. "I don't agree. I think the tremendous impact of the NWO may have caused some people to underestimate Raven's Flock. What if these guys had come to WCW before the NWO? We'd probably be talking about Raven, Sick Boy, and Lodi instead of Hogan, Hall, and Nash. If something happens to the NWO, this group could easily fill the void."

So far, Raven has made no threats against the NWO. He seems content to watch matches



It's Hammer time! Hammer takes a turn beating on Benoit. Benoit has faced just about every member of the Flock except Raven, who always manages to keep a safe distance from the former Horseman.

from his ringside seat and quote Edgar Allan Poe. Yet there must be a motive behind the madness. There must be a reason why he has amassed such a force.

When pressed to reveal his motive, Raven, as usual, waxes benevolent—insisting his reasons are philanthropic. "These were human beings who were hurting deep inside," he said. "I merely lifted them from the gutter of humanity and gave them the gift of life. My family of distressed souls may declare war on the wrestling world—or we may just go home and watch television. It is not for me to say ... until I feel like saying it."

Meanwhile, Benoit is determined to keep Raven from saying anything at all. "What if someone had simply stopped Scott Hall and Kevin Nash dead in their tracks back in the summer of 1996?" he asked. "Maybe if someone had stepped up to the plate and humiliated those guys, Hogan would have never joined them. Same with Bagwell, Randy Savage, and Konnan. People usually don't get much credit for solving problems

in their infancy. But that's what I'm going to do. I'm gonna destroy Raven's Flock while they're still in their nest!"

Saving WCW from Raven's Flock is a noble gesture on

Benoit's part, but a war with Raven could have an ill effect on his career should he fail. Raven and his followers have everything to gain from a feud with Benoit. Scotty Riggs, Billy Kidman, Sick Boy, Lodi, and Van Hammer all need experience against a wrestler of Benoit's magnitude to get ahead in WCW. By feuding with the Flock, Benoit is doing just what Raven wants. Raven will let his thugs soften up Benoit so he can finish the job. As a result, Raven advances his career by using Benoit as a steppingstone.

"People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw steppingstones," Raven muttered in response to this theory. "Young boy Chris is crying for help. He is begging for our attention. Young boy Chris is so idealistic. We, as the elder statesmen, must show him that foolishness spawns more foolishness. There will come a time when we will tolerate this young Pegasus no more."

For Benoit, this is no longer a matter of personal pride. His future and the future of WCW could be at stake. □



Stevie Richards and The Blue Meanie eventually managed to escape Raven's clutches when they were all in ECW. Richards has since left wrestling and The Blue Meanie has had little impact in ECW action, which probably tells us something about Raven's leadership ability.

HOTSEAT

MARLENA

"ANYONE BUT LUNA!"

IT SEEMS AS if no one can predict what the bizarre Goldust is going to do next. Try being his wife. Marlena "directed" Goldust's career until their public breakup a few months ago. Marlena, a.k.a. Terri Runnels, had been the most ardent supporter of her husband, Dustin, since they entered the WWF in 1995. Fans saw a lingerie-wearing psychopath who took a sick pleasure in using his ambiguous sexuality to unbalance opponents. But Marlena knew what was underneath that blond wig and makeup: a loving husband and devoted father.

In the summer of 1997, the strange duo decided to unveil themselves and reveal the real people behind their adopted personae. In no time, Goldust and Marlena became Dustin and Terri again. Dustin, in particular, explained how his Goldust character helped give him the confidence to emerge from his father's shadow. Indeed, forging a career completely separate from the Dusty Rhodes legend was the only way Dustin could become his own man. The couple also introduced fans to their young daughter, Dakota.

The warm family story turned sour when Goldust became embroiled in a bitter feud with Brian Pillman. Then Pillman made the ultimate challenge to Goldust.

If Pillman lost their next match, he would leave the WWF. If Goldust lost, he would let Marlena be Pillman's valet for 30 days. Goldust was reluctant to agree, but Marlena readily accepted ... and Goldust lost.

Pillman's tragic death on October 5 put more emotional strains on the Runnels' relationship. A few weeks later, Goldust shocked Marlena with horrible news. He had found a new companion: Luna Vachon. Marlena has been relatively quiet about this new development—until now. *INSIDE WRESTLING*'s Harry Burkett spoke with Marlena at her home near Atlanta.

"A big part of me still loves Dustin as much as I ever have. I love him for the husband and father he has been. But he is disgusting me now."

Q: Thank you, Marlena, for speaking with me today. I know it's a very emotional time for you. I'm sure everyone will be very interested in anything you have to say.

A: I appreciate getting the chance to address some

issues affecting my life. I think my fans deserve an explanation. After all, much of our dirty laundry has been aired in public. It wouldn't be fair to shut everyone out now.

Q: That's understandable. Everyone knows about the roller-coaster ride you've been on in recent months. In early-September, you were the reluctant valet of Brian Pillman and, before the 30 days were over, he died. That certainly must have taken a toll on you.

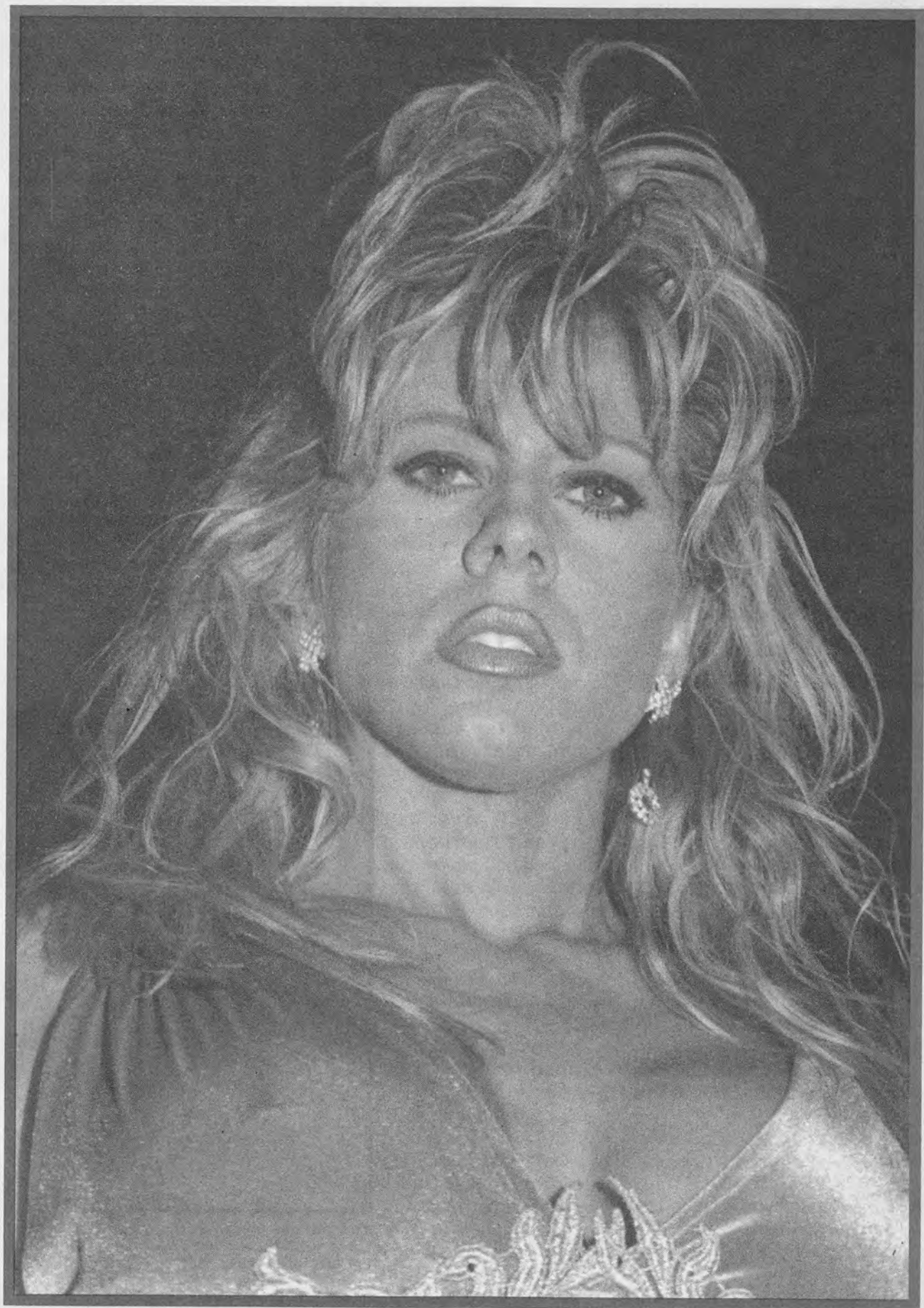
A: Yes, it certainly did. It's always tragic when a young life is taken away so suddenly. At the time, I was dealing with Brian under unusual circumstances. Yet I knew about the other side of Brian, that of a husband and terrific father.

Q: That tragedy was compounded when you and Dustin got back together. It seemed as if it would be a happy ending for the Runnels family after all. But Dustin had some rather bad news for you.

A: You mean Goldust.

Q: I'm sorry, what's that?

A: That man you're talking about is Goldust. That creature we are seeing today bears no resemblance to my husband, Dustin.





"I'm enjoying my time with Dakota very much these days, and I'm not sure if I want to give that up anytime soon. But if I do return to the WWF, you can bet I'll be doing more than modeling T-shirts."

Q: *He didn't pick the best of times to spring this news on you, either. He did it during an interview both of you were doing on Raw. Why do you think he did that?*

A: He wanted to humiliate me, plain and simple. I still don't know what I did to deserve it. Part of him wants to be the master of psychological games. The other just wants to be a fightin' country boy. He definitely has a split personality when it comes to wrestling. When I'm not feeling angry at him, I feel sorry for him.

Q: *Did you find his selection of Luna Vachon as his new valet particularly insulting?*

A: I'm surprised you have to ask that question! It's one thing to embarrass your wife on national television. It's another thing to say that you want

someone else. But for my replacement to be a monster like Luna is the biggest insult of my life! He could have picked anyone else and I wouldn't be this upset. Sunny, Sable, George Steele, it doesn't matter. Anyone but Luna!

Q: *Have either Goldust or you ever had any contact with Luna?*

A: No way! I've never met her in my life. I've never heard Goldust mention her name. I don't know how he met her or why he's attracted to her or what's going on. My bet is that it's all a ruse. But he's going to regret playing me for the fool.

Q: *Well, that leads to another interesting point. Everyone is wondering if you're going to take any recourse. In other words, do you plan on teaching Goldust a lesson?*

A: That's a rather strong statement, but I wouldn't say it's false. Of course, a big part of me still loves Dustin as much as I ever have. I love him for the husband and father he has been. But he is disgusting me now. I guess I never felt ashamed when I helped him plot out all those psychological escapades over the years. It feels a lot different being on the other end. But the fact that he has turned on *me*, his own wife, makes me think that Dustin has truly snapped.

Q: *But you haven't answered my question.*

A: I can't really come up with a strategy until I decide what I want to accomplish. Do I want to make Goldust pay for what he has done to me? Do I want to

drive him out of wrestling altogether? Or do I just want to give Goldust a taste of his own medicine so he'll come to his senses? I'm not really sure. Sometimes I see Dustin, my husband. Other times I just see a freak with weird makeup and weird outfits. Then I see that hideous Luna close by his side ... a little too close. That makes me livid.

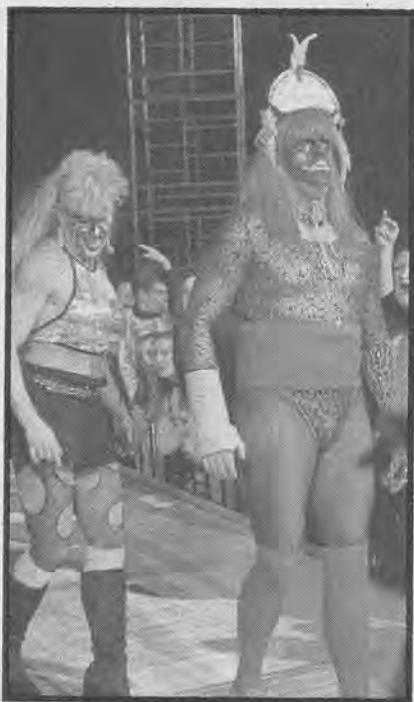
Q: *Have you considered finding another wrestler to go up against Goldust?*

A: I think Vader is giving Goldust all he can handle right now. I feel really strange cheering for someone who's beating up my husband, but can you blame me? Maybe Vader will pound on his head until he starts thinking clearly again.

Q: *You have spent countless hours scouting opponents for Goldust in the past. And, as a manager, you probably keep tabs on who's hot in the WWF. Is there anyone out there worthy of your guidance?*



Marlena, who helped Dustin perfect the Goldust character, believes that underneath the makeup, the bizarre cross-dressing, even the shameful affair with Luna Vachon, there still exists a loving father and devoted husband."



Is there anything Marlena can do to get her man back? By the looks of things, Luna Vachon has complete control over The Artist Formerly Known as Goldust.

A: Sure there is (*Laughs*). But everyone wants to be a part of a gang or clique these days. The other wrestlers are on their own because they want it that way. For a manager like me, the best bet is to get someone who's just on the verge of superstardom. I think guys like Tom Brandi, Flash Funk, and Brian Christopher fit into that category. Any of those fellows could use a good manager.

Q: Could either of them be a good match for Goldust?

A: Maybe. Almost anyone could be a threat if they had some inside information. If someone knew Goldust's training habits, for example. Or if they knew his physical weaknesses..

Q: Of course, you realize that finding a suitable opponent for Goldust would solve only one problem. But you know someone must counteract Luna's constant interference?

A: Oh, I would be more than happy to oblige. I would take

great pleasure in cramming a big, smoky cigar in her face! It might improve her looks.

Q: Whoa, you shouldn't get ahead of yourself. Luna Vachon is one of the toughest women wrestlers of all-time. With all due respect, she probably outweighs you by a good 30 pounds.

A: Don't get me wrong. Luna is tougher than most men. She also looks more like a man than most men. Luna may have a strong body, but something tells me that her mind is weak. I know I can beat her in that department.

Q: I was going to ask if you were planning on returning to the WWF. But I think you've answered that question already.

A: Not too fast. I'd better clarify that a little. I'm not 100 percent sure if I want the responsibility of guiding anyone's career at this time. I would like nothing better than to get revenge against Goldust and Luna. I don't want my daydreaming to give you the wrong impression. I'm enjoying my time with Dakota very much these days, and I'm not sure if I want to give that up anytime soon. But if I do return to the WWF, you can bet I'll be doing more than modeling T-shirts.

Q: How is Dakota doing these days?

A: She's doing fine. She's the most intelligent kid I know.

Q: Are you afraid that these professional matters will have an adverse effect on her?

A: Not really. I have always been careful to keep her life as stable as possible. I would rather not delve into any more family issues. I like to keep a high wall between my personal and professional lives. I've already learned they don't mix well.

Q: Are you proud of what you



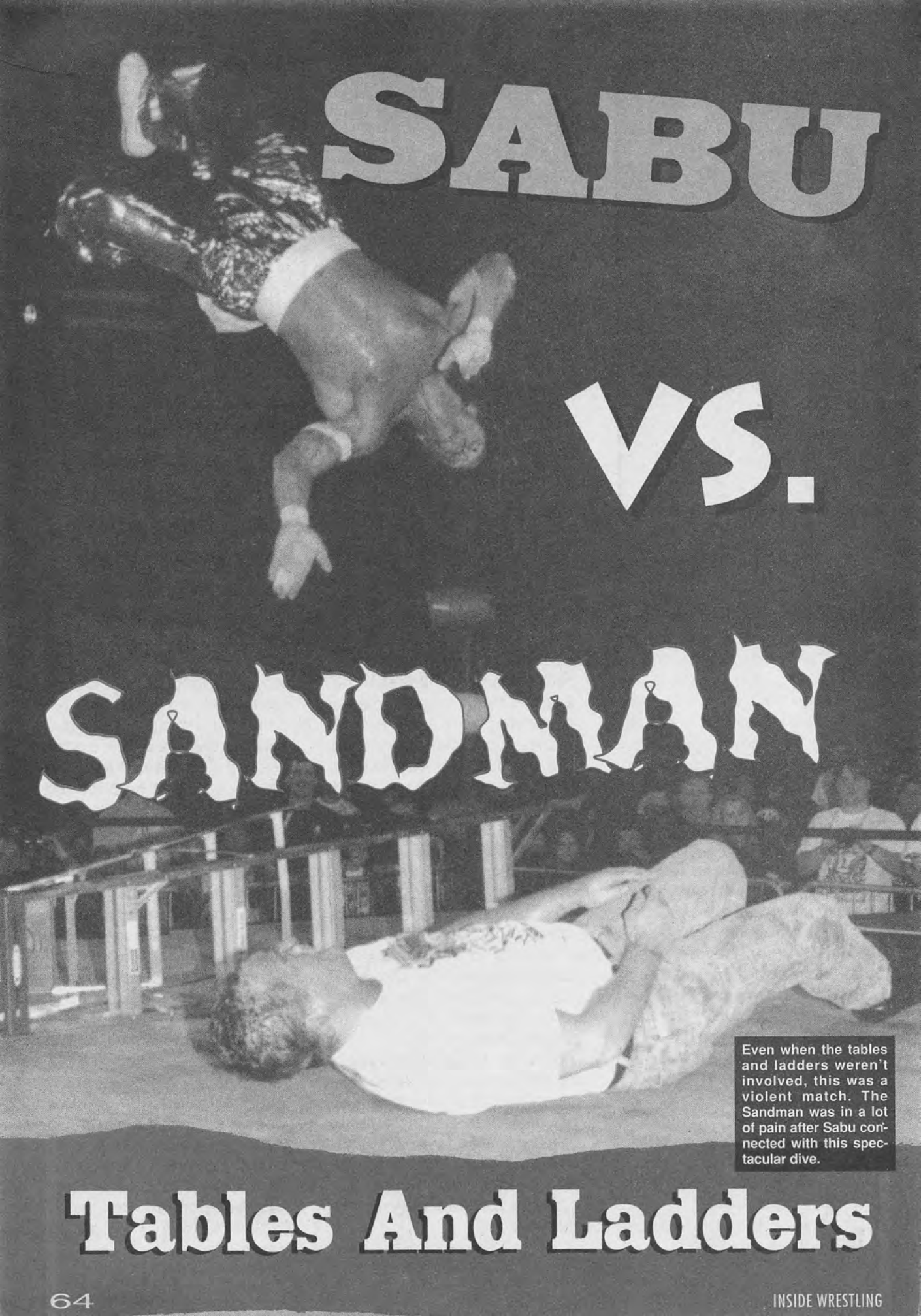
"Do you think Luna is a real friend, Dustin? I think she'll do anything to squirm back into the spotlight. Don't be a fool. It's never too late to turn back."

accomplished in your professional life?

A: Sure. But I'm the first to recognize that I couldn't have done it without Goldust. I'm very proud that he captured the Intercontinental title within his first year in the WWF. But, on the other hand, Goldust should be man enough to realize he couldn't have done that without me.

Q: Do you have a personal message for your husband?

A: I certainly do. I don't know what kind of game you're playing, but you've broken our number-one rule. We promised that we would never play against each other. We were the team. It was us against the world. Do you think Luna is a real friend, Dustin? I think she'll do anything to squirm back into the spotlight. Don't be a fool. It's never too late to turn back. □



SABU

VS.

SANDMAN

Even when the tables and ladders weren't involved, this was a violent match. The Sandman was in a lot of pain after Sabu connected with this spectacular dive.

Tables And Ladders

In ECW, almost anything goes, especially on a pay-per-view. When Sandman and Sabu battled at the November to Remember pay-per-view, the use of foreign objects was *very strongly* encouraged!



It was Sabu's turn to be in agony when Sandman catapulted over the top rope and drove him through a table. It would be hard to argue that this was a classic wrestling match, but it was interesting and it was violent.

Photos by John S. Pithers

By Dave Rosenbaum

THERE IS A very simple goal in professional wrestling matches: That goal is to win.

But there are separate goals for men such as Sabu and The Sandman. They are independent wrestlers who make their living by thrilling crowds. Their goal is to win in an entertaining fashion.

At some point, however, the two goals criss-cross, and what's left over isn't wrestling and isn't entertainment. It's carnage. It's

the sight of one man lying in the ring unable to move for several minutes, then getting treated for an injured shoulder, an injured arm, and severely banged up ribs. It's the sight of 10 broken tables and a ladder that was used for a purpose not prescribed in any wrestling rulebook.

When Sabu battled The Sandman at ECW's November to Remember pay-per-view at the Golden Dome in Monaca, Pennsylvania, wrestling had little to do with what happened. They were encouraged to destroy

each other. And they happily complied.

"It was the most violent match I've ever seen," said Frank Lebowitz, a fan who sat in the second row. "On one hand, it was some of the strangest wrestling I've ever seen. They missed with more moves than they hit. On the other hand, if they had converted every one of their moves, there would have been two dead men in the middle of the ring at the end of the match. We wanted a violent match, but we didn't want that."

And Chairs—Oh, My!

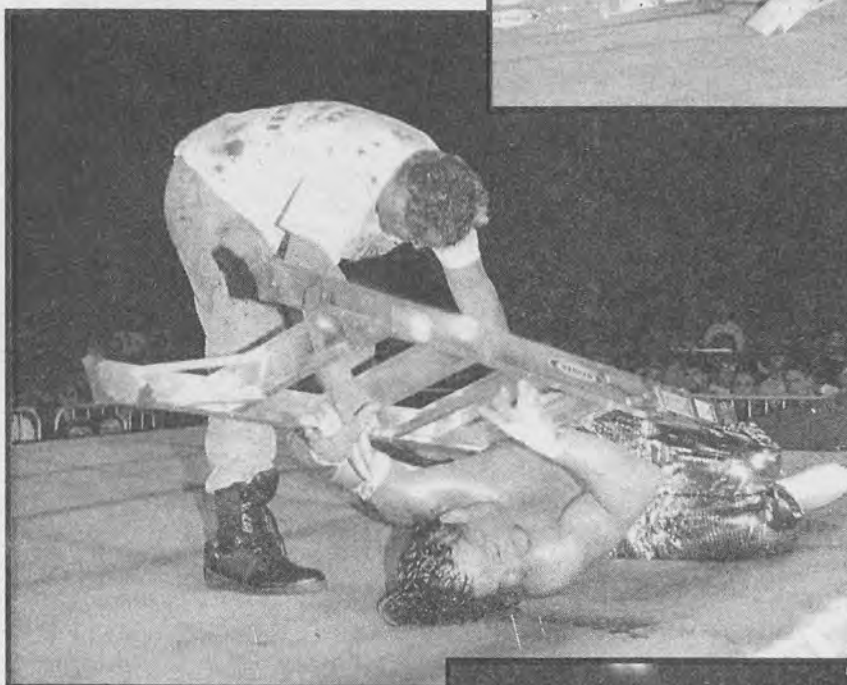
Can you picture that? Sabu vs. Sandman was ruled a no-contest. The reason: death.

Fortunately, that didn't happen.

Unfortunately, this did: ECW sanctioned a match between Sabu and The Sandman in which the use of tables and ladders wasn't only allowed, it was encouraged. It was a tables and ladders match. Never heard of one? If you're not a devout ECW fan, there's no reason you should have. Then again, ECW is constantly testing the boundaries of decency, and it crossed



Sabu wasn't hurting when he calmly walked on the top rope in an effort to get to the ladder, but he was just seconds later, when Sandman saw to it that he dropped groin-first onto that rope.



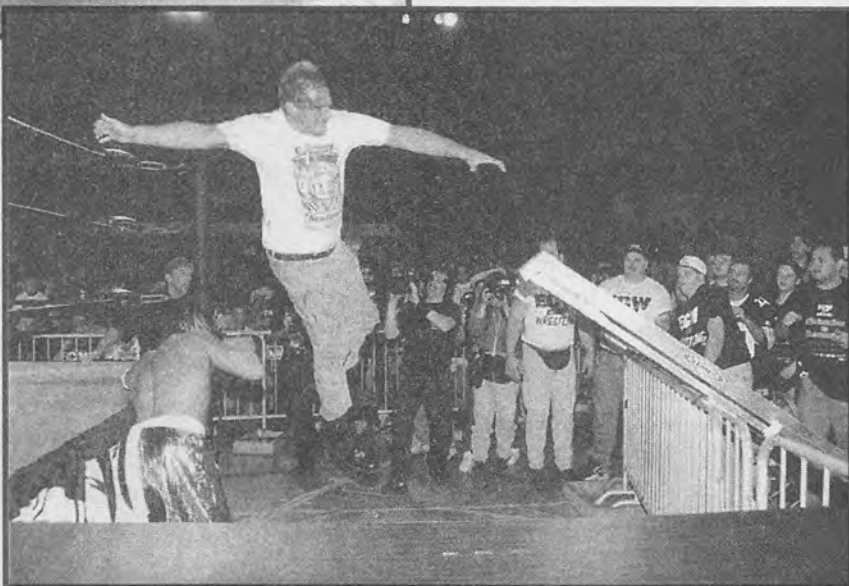
Sandman repeatedly smashed Sabu with a ladder inside the ring (above), but his attempt to leap out of the ring and slingshot the ladder onto Sabu failed (right). Hey, the guy was pretty beat up by then!

far over the line for this one.

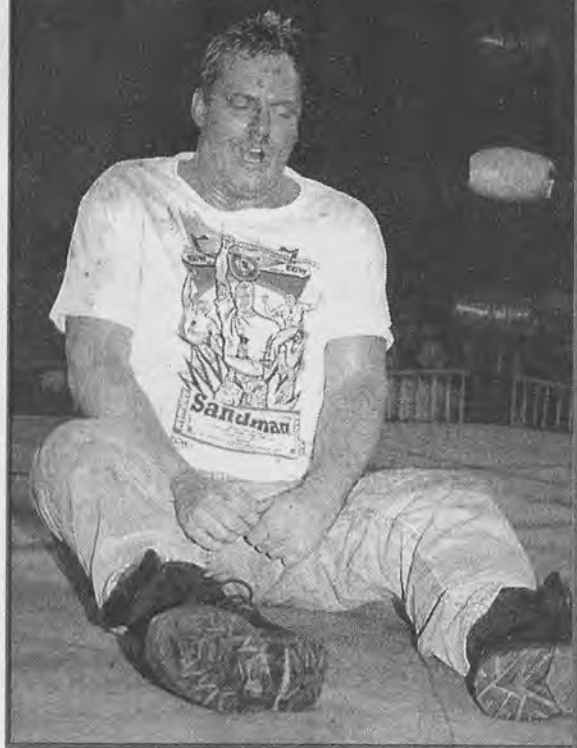
It was the match that shouldn't have happened. But it did.

That a sellout crowd of 4,634, plus tens of thousands more on pay-per-view, witnessed the match only made matters worse. This wasn't wrestling.

"It was wrestling," Sandman insisted. "Wrestling in its purest form. No holds barred. Every-



Sandman barely had enough strength to sit up by the time the match was over.



spent the past 45 minutes in the show-er. Then he sat down, pulled on his clothes, and walked away without an-
swering questions.

"Not tonight," Alfonso said. "He's got some things to take care of."

Some things to take care of? Consider Sabu the second coming of Superman if he did anything but go right to bed.

Those 10 broken tables? Some of them were broken over Sabu. One of the high points of the match came when Sandman catapulted himself off a ladder and delivered a som-

ersault splash over the top rope onto Sabu and through a table. The table splintered cleanly in half, and both men laid on the floor in obvious pain. And both men got right up.

Sabu threw fire at Sandman,

who deftly stepped out of the way. But Sandman crashed through more than his share of tables, too; he was struck by so many dropkicks that he should have painted a bull's-eye on his chest.

There were somersaults through tables and spectacular springboards by Sabu. At one point, an arena worker was heard yelling to one of his co-workers, "Do we have any more tables back there?" Memo to the Golden Dome administrative staff: Table rental is not the answer when ECW comes to town.

Oh, by the way, there were some chairs used in this bout, too, but that seemed pretty tame compared to everything else that went on.

"A lot of people thought this match shouldn't have happened," Alfonso said. "Well, it happened, and the crowd loved it. I hope it happens again. So does Sabu."

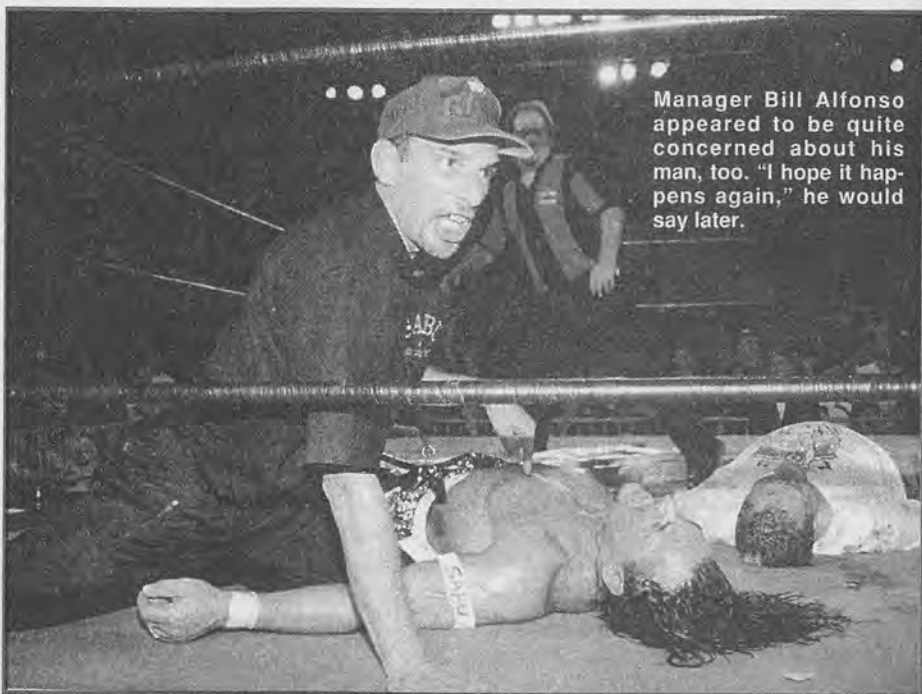
But as Sabu limped toward the arena exit, he offered no comment on whether ECW should hold more tables and ladders matches. His appearance said this should have been the last. □

were there, so we used them."

For the record, Sabu won the match when he pinned Sandman at 20:55. Sandman was getting ready to hit Bill Alfonso when Sabu dropkicked him from the top rope. Then he used a ladder—not *the* ladder, but a ladder—to deliver an Arabian facebuster that laid out Sandman. Sabu easily covered him for the pin.

"It could have been a three-hour count," Alfonso later bragged. "Sandman was done for the night. Sabu didn't even have to bother covering him. What we saw was what happens when you go to the extreme with Sabu. You have no chance of ever coming back."

Maybe not, but Sabu didn't look so good, either, after the match. His face was swollen and he walked with a limp. Reporters waited by his locker for an hour, and when Sabu walked in, he reported that he had



Manager Bill Alfonso appeared to be quite concerned about his man, too. "I hope it happens again," he would say later.

The telephone wires sizzle each month, as two top wrestlers voice their rage and hostility toward each other. Here's the unedited transcript of their conversation, your chance to feel the raw emotion that results when two antagonists face off ...
One On One

MARC MERO HAS become a difficult man to understand. So difficult, in fact, that Sable, the woman he used to call "my inspiration," has trouble knowing what to make of him.

The two united as soon as Mero made his WWF debut at WrestleMania XII. At the time, Sable was seconding Hunter Hearst Helmsley and had just seen him destroyed in short order by The Ultimate Warrior. When the two returned to the locker room, Hunter was taking his frustrations out on Sable, interrupting a backstage interview with Mero. When the "Wildman" came to defend her honor, a donnybrook ensued, and Sable soon joined forces with Mero.

Mero and Sable rose to great heights together. The leather-clad pair won the fans' affections and Mero defeated Faarooq in a tournament final to capture the vacant Intercontinental championship in 1996.

A month later, however, Mero was double-crossed by mentor Curt Hennig and dropped the I-C strap to arch-rival Helmsley. Shortly thereafter, Mero suffered a serious knee injury and spent more than six months on the sidelines.

When Mero returned to active competition, he returned with less hair and more intensity. Gone were the glitter and glamour. In their place were aggression and an overly jealous watch over Sable. Mero challenged Butterbean when he thought the super heavyweight boxer was making eyes at Sable, and now he appears on the verge of an all-out feud with Tom Brandi for the same offense.

To understand Mero's recent actions, we managed to persuade him and Sable to discuss matters ... "One On One."

ONE O



"Vince McMahon gave me the opportunity to do a little modeling and I took it. I was trying to keep your name in the headlines so you wouldn't be overlooked for title matches when you came back from your injury."

—Sable

SABLE: Marc, I'm glad you agreed to do this. A lot of the fans who write and e-mail me want to find out why you've been so angry with me lately. I certainly don't know why.

MARC MERO: Is Tom Brandi one of the fans who e-mails you? Or does he send you love letters written in crayon on red construction paper hearts that he cut out?

S: What are you talking about? Tom doesn't send me love letters. What's got into your head? Remember when you won the Intercontinental title? You thanked me for my support and help. What have I done in the past year that's so bad that you try to beat up anyone who says hello to me?

M: You mean other than abandoning me so you could walk around half-naked on worldwide television? How about modeling T-shirts for other guys while I was suffering from what could have been a career-ending knee injury? How about trying to hook up with someone else because you weren't sure if I'd ever come back to wrestling? Yeah, maybe I am overreacting just a little!

S: Marc, you know that's not how it was. I don't know who you're trying to fool. Of course I was devastated when

N ONE



"Everybody's eyes are always on Sable. I'm in the ring beating up some chump and trying to get back in line for a title shot, and I look and see you blowing kisses into the camera. I'm sick of it!"

—Marc Mero

you were injured. I don't ever want to see you hurt. I didn't want people to forget you while you were recovering. Vince McMahon gave me the opportunity to do a little modeling and I took it. I was trying to keep your name in the headlines so you wouldn't be overlooked for title matches when you came back from your injury.

M: Yeah, that's why you were never modeling "Wildman" T-shirts, right? Always Steve Austin shirts or Shawn Michaels shirts or Bret Hart shirts. While I was in physical therapy trying to rehabilitate my knee, I'd watch you on television. I'd hear the things everybody was saying about you. I read the signs the fans waved when you walked up and down the runway in a Shawn Michaels shirt. Funny, I don't remember you coming out and saying "Everybody better remember Marc Mero, because he's going to come back soon, and he's going to be taking names." Did I miss that, Sable?

S: You're not being fair, Marc. I was doing what I needed to do to build on the momentum you had before you were hurt.

M: And you weren't just doing it to outdo Sunny? Or

were you trying to get more attention for your modeling career?

S: You know I don't particularly care for Sunny, and yes, I was proud to beat her to become Miss Slammy earlier this year. I'm proud of how I look, and I am happy that people want to see me modeling. But it isn't fair for you to say I gave up on you. Is that why you changed your style so much? Did you start breaking rules because you were mad at me?

M: I went back to basics because my roots are in boxing. I went back to my boxing style because I saw how lenient the WWF had gotten when it came to rules enforcement. I figured if they'll let gangs go out there and bash chairs over each other's heads, then they'll let me use my best weapon: my fists. When I played by their rules, I got my knee torn up. When I fight by my rules, I'm the best there is.

S: What's your problem with Tom Brandi?

M: Brandi is just the next in a long line to try to ride on your coattails. Everybody's eyes are always on Sable. I'm in the ring beating up some chump and trying to get back in line for a title shot, and I look and see you blowing kisses into the camera. I'm sick of it! Brandi's just trying to stay as close to you as possible so that his face shows up on television and he gets noticed. His career wasn't exactly taking off as Sal Sincere, was it? The thing is, you're too busy parading around in your skimpy little outfits to notice.

S: And you think Butterbean was trying to do the same thing?

M: Butterbean can win all the little tough man contests he wants. If he wants to be a big man, he's got to do it in the WWF. You were nothing but his shortcut to a pay-per-view match without him having to earn his spot for it. Of course, that match was against me, and now that fat piece of garbage will think twice before he ever steps up with the big boys.

S: Marc, I have my own career. I have my own life. You can't control the way I dress or who I choose to talk to. You know, when we first met, you were doing the same thing Tom Brandi is doing now. You stuck up for me when Helmsley was blaming me for his loss to The Ultimate Warrior. Now, after you were disqualified against Butterbean, you're yelling at me because I'm distracting people's attention away from you.

M: The difference is that I have good reasons to be angry, unlike Helmsley. I never tried to use you to advance my own career. I helped a woman who needed someone to defend her. Now I don't even know if that woman still exists.

S: Marc, we've been through far too much for all this. I want the best for both of us, for both of our careers. Is that too much to ask for?

M: Maybe it is. Listen, I don't want to talk about this anymore. Remember what I said about Brandi. There will be others after him. They're all trying to benefit from my fame through you. Right now, I have to work out. I have to lift some leg weights and do some time on the speedbag. We'll talk about all this another time. □

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Sincerely Yours

(Continued from page 5)

WCW's syndicated shows? I realize Eddy may think he deserves more mainstream recognition, but he's not going to get good reviews until he drops that attitude. First, he turns his back on his family, beating up his nephew, Chavo Jr. Then he alienates everybody by attacking just about anyone who gets in his way and cheating to keep his cruiserweight title.

Eddy is a great competitor who should be proud of his abilities and accomplishments, but his ego is out of control. He had garnered only minimal success in WCW before he turned bad, but it wasn't because of his attitude. It was because Eddy found himself lumped in with a great pool of cruiserweight talent. This was evident when he unexpectedly dropped the cruiserweight title to Ultimo Dragon on *Nitro*. Eddy wasn't robbed or cheated; he tapped out. Tapping out doesn't mean he's lost his ability. It just means he met a better competitor that night.

I will admit that I hardly noticed Guerrero before this change of heart, but after seeing his new attitude and style, I wish I didn't have to notice him now.

PAUL MECKLER
Glenside, CA

END THE HATE

It broke my heart to read Carl Kartier's letter to Commissioner Slaughter about the prejudice shown toward Canadians by kids in his neighborhood ("Disheartening! Bret's Evil Clutch On The WWF!" January 1998). I think it's

terrible that many American children swear at Bret and dislike Carl because he is Canadian.

I take exception to the fact that most of what went wrong in the WWF was blamed on Bret and The Hart Foundation. The little so-called war between the U.S. and Canada was not entirely Bret's fault. He did instigate it, but what he did can't be compared to the actions of Steve Austin and others in the WWF. First of all, Austin was the one who started swearing and using obscene gestures that fired up the fans. I think the situation was aggravated because some WWF executives probably dislike Canadians, too.

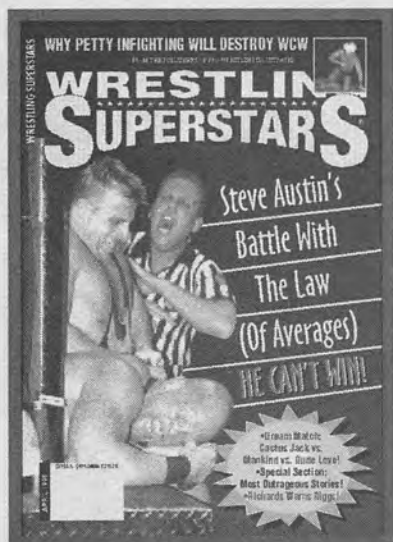
CORRIE McDERMOTT
Westport, MA ☐



Why hate Bret Hart just because he's Canadian? Reader Corrie McDermott can't believe the cycle of hatred the WWF and Steve Austin started by degrading Bret for his pro-Canada views.

This Month In...

WRESTLING SUPERSTARS

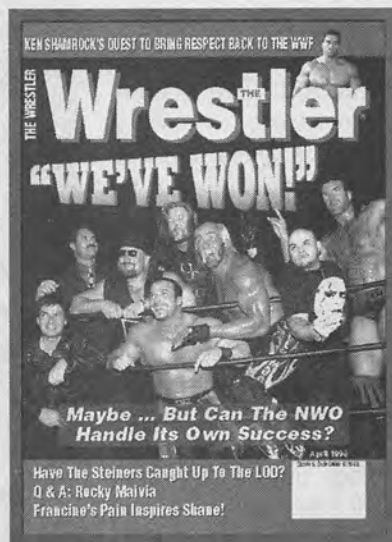


STEVE AUSTIN thinks he can win any battle he gets himself into, but we're betting against him in his battle with the law of averages. Sooner or later, someone will reinjure his spine. Maybe retirement isn't such a bad option ... Don't miss our special analysis of why petty in-fighting will destroy WCW ... We've given you some unusual "Dream Matches" over the years, but none as outlandish as a triple threat match pitting **CACTUS JACK** against **MANKIND** against **DUDE LOVE!** ... Did **THE BROOKLYN BRAWLER** actually come close to winning the WWF title?

All this—and much more!—
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NOW ON SALE!

Wrestler



The **NEW WORLD ORDER** is already proclaiming victory over WCW and is on the verge of becoming a legitimate entity. But will the NWO's success be its ultimate doom? ... There's a lonely voice screaming for an end to the chaos in the WWF. But it's also a very loud voice. **KEN SHAMROCK** is ready to bring respect back to the federation—his way ... **THE ROAD WARRIORS** have cast a long shadow over the sport for the past 15 years. Is there any team that can approach their greatness? In our special analysis, we make the case for **RICK** and **SCOTT STEINER**

All this—and much more—
in the April 1998 issue of
The Wrestler

NOW ON SALE!

On The Road

(Continued from page 10)

Now we have cigar smokers and beer can litterers. Anything else?

Lex Luger. He's a big man with an impressive physique. Before each match, he rubs coconut oil all over his body. Coconut oil smells.

"Bad—it smells bad," said a WCW wrestler. "I know why he does it. When you have a body like Lex's, coconut oil makes it look even better. It gives him that nice shine. Put coconut oil on a fat man's body and you have a fat man wearing coconut oil. With him, it's impressive. But it smells so bad. I just wish he'd do it somewhere else instead of smelling up the locker room with coconut oil."

Goldust: The man wears a lot of makeup.

"And he clogs up the bathroom drains with all that face paint and makeup," said a WWF wrestler. "I have nothing against the man, but it's disgusting. You always know when Goldust's been around, because the sink is covered with makeup, and sometimes even the mirror is covered with makeup, because the man's a slob. An S-L-O-B slob. He oughta be more considerate of other people."

All of this brings to mind something Verne Gagne told me about four years ago. We were talking about what makes a federation great, and Verne said the following: "Chemistry. The chemistry between the wrestlers is very important."

This sounded like a strange answer, because wrestling isn't a team sport. Although there are fan favorites and rulebreakers, most of the action is one-on-one and two-on-two, and how one fan favorite fares has very little to do with how another fan favorite fares. I never thought of chemistry being important in wrestling, the way it is in team sports such as baseball,



The Sandman can always get a rise out of an ECW crowd by smashing a beer can against his head. But he ought to take a little time to dispose of his empties.

basketball, hockey, and baseball. Verne explained.

"It's important that everybody on each side gets along," he said. "You can't have everybody angry at each other all the time. When you get right down to it, the success of the federation as a whole comes down to the performance of the individual wrestlers. They have

to care for each other."

So, DDP, buy some better cigars or maybe just cut down a little.

Mr. Sandman, throw away your beer cans.

Lex, buy some no-smell coconut oil.

Goldust, put away your makeup.

According to Verne Gagne, you're all in this together. □

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Behind the Door

(Continued from page 12)

Wrestlers are so different from other athletes. What makes them different also makes them vulnerable to tragedy. It is the saddest aspect of wrestling and the most difficult part of covering wrestlers. Walk into any locker room after any card. Look around. Chances are at least one of the wrestlers in that room won't be with us in about five or 10 years. It's the reality of this high-risk game, in which the combatants work and live on the edge.

The Purgatory Dream Tournament. You know, the more I think of

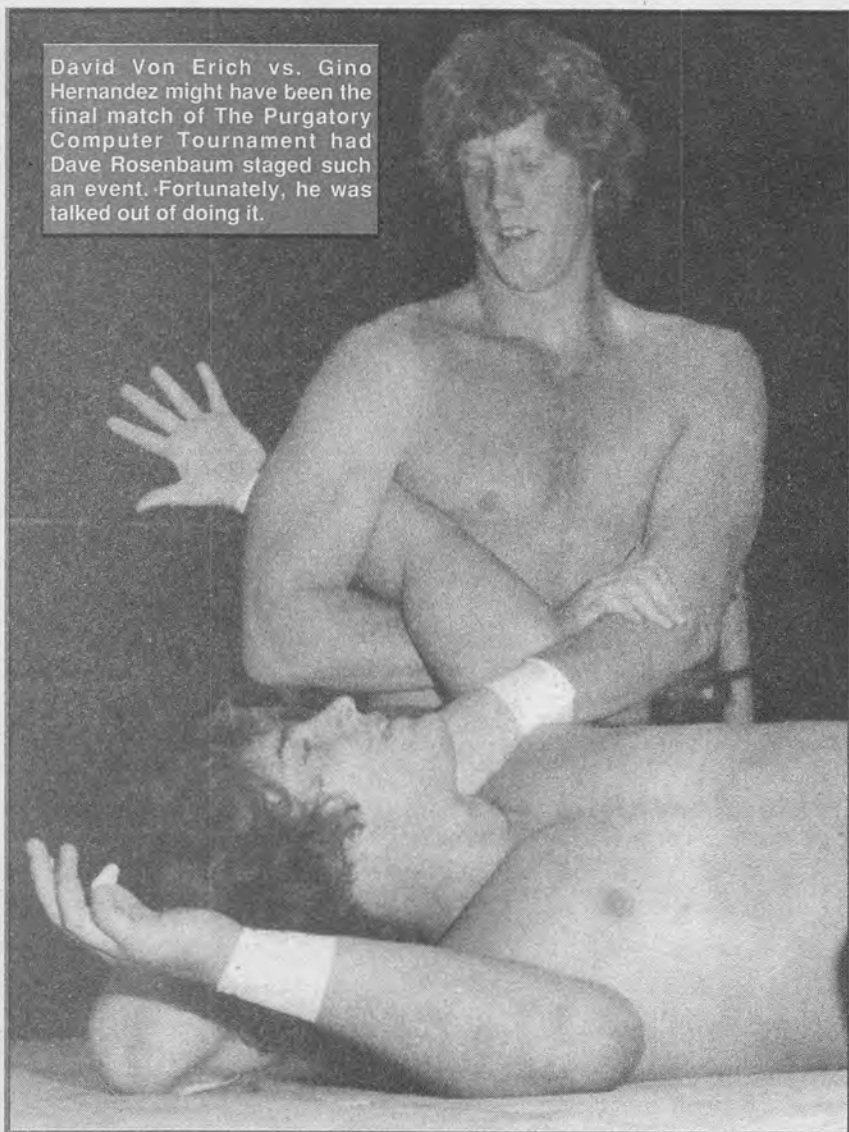
that idea, the more ashamed I get.

And if there's such a thing as purgatory, none of these men would have ended up there. There are few gray areas with professional wrestlers. They're either good or bad. They're likely to end up in either heaven or hell, if there are such things.

Gino Hernandez, David Von Erich, who knows where you guys are right now, but if there's a wrestling ring there, I'm sure you guys are going at it.

It's a match all of us still wish we could see. □

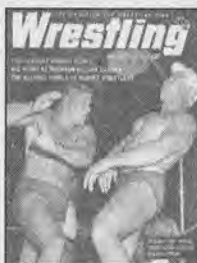
David Von Erich vs. Gino Hernandez might have been the final match of The Purgatory Computer Tournament had Dave Rosenbaum staged such an event. Fortunately, he was talked out of doing it.



COLLECTOR'S CORNER

Wrestling historians, rejoice! Some of the back issues in this ad have not been offered for sale for more than a decade—but a recent transfer of warehouse inventory from New York to Pennsylvania uncovered a small supply of these classic publications! Obviously, supplies are extremely limited, so all magazines will be sold on a first-come, first-served basis only. Prices quoted are based on the rarity of the issue and the number of available copies. For speediest service, use VISA or MasterCard or make payment by money order or certified check. Please don't send cash! Don't miss out on this once-in-a-lifetime chance to own a memorable piece of wrestling history! Once they're gone, they'll never be offered for sale again—so order today!

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Published between 1959 and 1964, *Wrestling Revue* is acknowledged as one of the finest series of wrestling magazines ever produced. These beautiful editions, all edited and published by Stanley Weston (founder of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*, *The Wrestler*, and *Inside Wrestling*, among so many other titles) set a standard for all wrestling magazines that followed, and are available now for the first time in many years!

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The Insider

(Continued from page 14)

was asked to fill in, and I jumped at the opportunity."

Michaels was shocked at first. He just stared for a few minutes before a small smirk finally came over his face. "So you're the one. You're the curdled cream in my professional coffee. I'll tell you this, hon. It takes a lot of guts to come in here after all you've written about me."

"I'm just telling it like it is, Shawn," I said as respectfully as I could.

"Shawn? You're calling me Shawn? What happened to Yawn or 'The Kneebreak Kid'?" he said sarcastically. "Where's that spirit? Where's the hatred for yours truly?"

"Still there," I told him. "But I am trying to maintain my professional demeanor while on the job. I might ask if you could do the same."

"Oh, I see," said Michaels. "Gee, a young chick like you should be part of our target audience. These wrestling fans are sick of the same tired crap week after week. DX gives them what they want."

"And another thing," he continued. "You hated me when I was a toady to the fans and now you still hate me after I gave up on them. I basically say the same things that you do."

So much for professional demeanor.

"Same things?!" I shrieked. "You don't stand for what I stand for! I stand for wrestlers with honor who express themselves without fear of retaliation!"

After settling down a bit, I calmly explained to the stunned Michaels that the difference between him and a true rulebreaker is that a true rulebreaker is prepared to answer for his words and deeds. DX commits stupid, cowardly acts, then hides from the consequences. And when it comes to lip service and making threats, Michaels has been

doing a lot more saying than doing.

Sensing that I had him figured out, Michaels changed his tone.

"Well, for such a young thing, you certainly are a seasoned analyst," he cooed in an obvious attempt to disarm me with flattery. "Look, this is the same Shawn that kicked Marty Jannetty in the face years ago and broke out on my own. I am a modern-day rulebreaker."

But that is just the problem with Michaels. He is not the same. His first turn years ago had impact and follow-through. This latest turn came as a result of Michaels getting his feelings hurt at SummerSlam. Michaels pouted and stomped his feet on that night, and he continues to do it to the chagrin of WWF officials and rulebreaking purists. Michaels is a crybaby, not a rulebreaker.

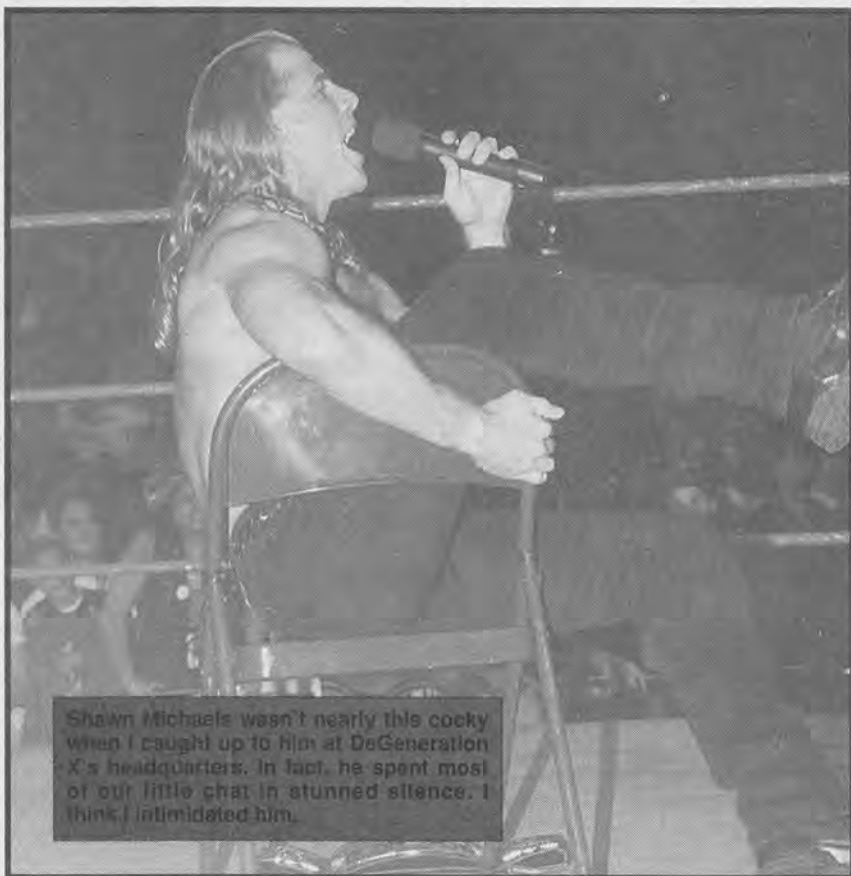
Guess what? I told him that, too.

I did more talking during that interview than Michaels did, but that is exactly why I stole—I mean took—the assignment. Hey, Michaels wanted me to get it off my chest, so I did. He just sat there in shock as I spelled out the A-B-Cs of rulebreaking.

"Well, Brandi, babe, I can't thank you enough for all the time, but I've got people to see and things to do," he curtly interrupted. "Tell you what, don't let that chip on your shoulder fall off as you're walking out the door."

I took the hint and quickly exited. But I still stand firm in my convictions. True rulebreaking convictions are based on the truth.

And that is the problem with Michaels. He can't handle the truth ... or the consequences. □



Shawn Michaels wasn't nearly this cocky when I caught up to him at DeGeneration X's headquarters. In fact, he spent most of our little chat in stunned silence. I think I intimidated him.

On Assignment

(Continued from page 16)



The chance to see great matches between the likes of Lex Luger and Ric Flair is one reason fans tune in to *Nitro* every week. But the ratings for the WWF's *Raw Is War* are starting to climb a bit, too.

glimmers of hope came via the exploitation of the Bret Hart Survivor Series debacle (that story lost its steam in a hurry) and the night the NWO took over *Nitro* (the ratings for the last hour of *Raw* that night were better than those of *Nitro*).

But in my opinion, WCW has consistently spanked WWF in the ratings by targeting, and capturing, that almighty (yet elusive) casual fan. That's why WCW is the new big dog.

The devout, obsessive wrestling fan, who comes running at the mere sight of two people near a ring, is an easy catch.

But the casual fans, the maniacs who scream their lungs out on those *Nitro* home videos and the ones who don't watch wrestling religiously and aren't as discerning, are the tough points to score. Heck, they can't even keep the acronyms right. WWF or WCW. It doesn't matter. The fireworks are all the same to them.

Go to your local high schools

and colleges. Check out a dorm lounge on Monday night. They're probably not watching the sometimes-live *Raw*. They're watching always-live *Nitro*. While *Nitro*'s novelty wore off long ago, the shock value has not. When you don't know what's going to happen next, you are more drawn to it. Especially when you're a casual fan.

Wrestling fans tend to only talk about wrestling with other wrestling fans. Casual fans will talk wrestling to anyone who'll put up with it, which sometimes leads to them recruiting more casual fans. As long as WCW has those kinds of fans in its grasp, it cannot lose.

With that in mind, the WWF's new strategy has become rather curious. It has gone from family fun to a bizarre, adult-oriented freak show. Goldust and Luna are rarely allowed to appear in the first hour. Promoters fear that they might encroach on the family hour ... or at least give young people jaded memories of their favorite children's stories. The members of

DeGeneration X, meanwhile, are more concerned with disrobing than dismantling opponents.

And don't even get me started on Steve Austin's use of profanity.

Wrestling is changing. Fans are changing. With more people watching, the sport is more closely scrutinized. One wrong move can turn off a million fans. But a series of intelligent moves over the course of a couple of years can tip the balance of power for decades. But if WCW is to stay on top—and there's a good chance it will be able to do that—it must make a lot more smart moves.

One of them would be taking good care of those casual fans. □

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April 1993: New Blood! The Wrestlers Who Could Revitalize The WWF In '93. Plus: Z-Man & Gunn, Sting-Vader, Dangerous Alliance, Ric Flair.

May 1993: Exclusive WrestlingMania IX Match Analysis. Also: Andre the Giant, Pillman & Austin, Great Muta, Headbangers-Steiners, 2 Cold Scorpio.

July 1993: Davey Boy Smith Dogs Big Van Vader: Could Bret Hart Be Next? Plus: Dino Bravo, Giant Gonzales, Razor Ramon, Arn Anderson, Dustin-Cactus-Rude, Tatanaka.

August 1993: Hulk Hogan vs. Yokozuna: The "Hulkster" Faces His Biggest Challenge Ever! Plus: Jeff Jarrett, Maxx Payne, Sid Vicious, Cactus-Vader, Bret Hart.

November 1993: Flair ("I'm The Man Again!") vs. Rude ("You Mean You Were The Man.")

Plus: Heavenly Bodies, Marty Jannetty, Rude-Flair, Hulk Hogan, Vader & Vicious, Lex Luger.

December 1993: "The Next Hulk Hogan": Why Lex Luger Will Succeed Where Warrior And Savage Failed. Plus: Tammy Fyfe, Steve Austin, Yokozuna, Sting & Flair, Tito Santana, Luna Vachon.

January 1994 (Special Issue): Wrestling's Seasonal Spectaculars! WWF's SummerSlam, WCW's Fall Brawl. Plus: Rick Martel, Missy Hyatt, Razor-Schyster, Steven Regal, Orndorff-Flair, Mascaras-Liger.

February 1994: Our Holiday Wish List For 1994. Plus: Hogan-Savage-Bret, Hackshaw Duggan, Dinkies, Hollywood Blonds, Steven Regal.

March 1994: Inside Wrestling Predicts: What's In Store For '94: Nastys & Missy, Col. Parker, Ludwig Barga, chairs, Survivor Series, Diesel-Michaels.

April 1994 (Special Issue): The Inside Wrestling Computer Tournament. Also: Lex Luger, Starrcade, Yoko-Fuji, Ric Flair, Curt Hennig, Funk-Sabu.

May 1994: Lex Luger & Bret Hart: Their Greatest Triumphs, Their Gravest Tragedies. Also: Flair-Rude, Rick Morton, Heenan-Backwinkel, Brian Christopher, Yoko-Booger.

June 1994: Wake Up, Rick Steamboat: Ric Flair Is Still "Slick" Ric! Also: Jimmy Snuka, Tony Anthony, IRS, Bruise Brothers, Alundra Blyeze, Freebirds.

July 1994 (Special Issue): A Look Into Wrestling's Future: You Won't Believe What You'll See! Also: Ron Simmons, Sting, Earthquake-Booger, Bob Armstrong, Diesel.

August 1994: 10 Years After Rock 'n' Wrestling: It's Time For Roddy To Get Rowdy Again! Also: Hulk Hogan, 911, Freebirds, rulebreakers, Cornette & Bodies, Bushwhackers.

September 1994: The Resurrection Of The Undertaker. Also: Nastys-Cactus & Maxx, Flair-Steamboat, Nikolai Volkoff, Rock 'n' Rolls, Luna Vachon.

October 1994 (Special Issue): WCW Midyear Report. Also: Doink, Vader-Race, Mabel, Dory Funk Jr., Owen-Bret, Hall of Fame.

December 1994: Hogan In Paradise ... And Ric Flair Feels The Thunder. Also: Bret-Owen, Rottens, Cactus, AAA midgets, Sparky Plugg, Dann E. Allen.

February 1995: It's Getting Ugly: Wrestling's Losing Its Greatest Heroes. Also: Sting, McMahon-Lawler, Cactus-Tommy, Woman, Brutus-Hogan, Valentine-Doink.

March 1995: Predictions 1995. Also: Nastys, Razor Ramon, Tazmaniac, Kid-Man O'-War, Pillman & Hogan.

April 1995 (Special Issue): The 1995 Inside Wrestling Computer Tournament! Also: Diesel,

Vader-Austin, Lex Luger, Jerry Lawler, Johnny B. Badd, Al Snow.

June 1995: The Beginning Of The End? Will Hulk Hogan Get Burned By Friendly Fire? Also: Steve Austin, Gangstas, Public Enemy, Bret-Owen, Jeff Jarrett.

July 1995 (Special Issue): Wrestling Cool!!! What's In—And Why—In The Mat Sport Today. Also: Savage & Sting, Alex Wright, Bruise Brothers, Dan Severn, Ivan Putski.

August 1995: The Untold Truth: WrestlingMania X—The Winners And Losers. Also: Johnny B. Badd, Bam Bam Bigelow, John Studd, Bubba-Sting.

October 1995 (Special Issue): WCW Midyear Report. Also: Randy Savage, Bret & Cactus, Sting, Diesel, Hawk.

November 1995: One Defense In Four Months? Strip Hulk Hogan Of The Title—Now! Also: Alex Wright, Tatanaka, King of Ring, Chris Benoit, Backlund-Clinton.

December 1995: White With Fright, Green With Envy: Why The Undertaker Had To Bury Kama. Also: Vader-Hogan, Warrior-Renegade, Gangstas-PE, Waylon Mercy, Heavenly Bodies.

January 1996: Our Holiday Wish List For 1996! Also: ude: Scott Norton, Sid Vicious, Psycosis-Misterio, Barry Horowitz, Sabu.

February 1996: Wrestling's Top Stars: What 1996 Has In Store For Them! Also: Goldust, Sherri-Parker, Mikey Whipwreck, Smokin' Gunns.

March 1996: His Excellency! How Bret Masterminded Diesel's Execution. Also: Jeff Jarrett, Giant, Jim Cornette, Survivor Series, Eddy Guerrero.

April 1996 (Special Issue): The 1996 Inside Wrestling Computer Tournament. Also: Bret-Undertaker, Four Horsemen, British Bulldog, Randy Savage, Sabu.

May 1996: Ready ... Aim ... Main! The Sick Race To Cripple Shawn Michaels. Also: Shane Douglas, Arn Anderson, Jerry Lawler, Hogan-Flair.

June 1996: Luger Or Hogan? If Sting Makes The Wrong Choice, He's Through! Also: Road Warriors, Roddy Piper, Ahmed Johnson, Raven, Al Snow.

July 1996 (Special Issue): Warrior: Why He'll Save The WWF; Why He'll Sink The WWF. Also: Top stars answer personal questions, Diesel-Hogan, Dallas Page, Bret Hart.

August 1996: The Greening Of Wrestling: How Sting & Shawn Will Become \$50,000,000 Men! Also: Bodydonnas, Giant, Guerrero-Misterio, George Steele, Goldust & Marlena.

September 1996: She's No Booh! Sunny: More

Than Just Sex Appeal. Also: Lawler-Jarrett, 911, Brian Pillman, Alex Wright, championship chaos.

October 1996 (Special Issue): WCW Midyear Report. Also: Jake Roberts, Yokozuna, Giant-Konnan, Ahmed Johnson, Chris Jericho, strutters.

November 1996: The Steiners: Feasting On A Buffet Of Violence. Also: Shawn Michaels, Sabu-Douglas, King of Ring, Eddy Guerrero, truck stop terror.

December 1996: Three Women For Four Horsemen? The Hot Search For A Fourth Filly Has Begun! Also: Sunny & Gunns, Giant, Goldust, Cornette & Hart, Jerry Jarrett.

Holiday 1996 (Special Issue): The Tombstone: Wrestling's Deadliest Finisher. Also: 1997 calendar, "Psycho" Sid, Benoit-Misterio, Steiners-NWO, Pit Bull I, Justin Liger.

January 1997: Dreaming Of A Sunny Christmas ... Our Holiday Wish List For The Stars. Also: Michaels & Undertaker, Sting, Barry Windham, Faarooq, NWO.

February 1997: Trouble In EgoVille: Is There An NWO Within The NWO? Also: Chris Candido, Bret-Shawn, Ric Flair, Joey Styles, Liger-Benoit.

March 1997: Why Bret's Execution Will Be Excellent By WrestlingMania! Also: Roddy Piper, Syxx, Survivor Series, Steve Austin, talent scouts.

April 1997 (Special Issue): The 1997 Inside Wrestling Computer Tournament. Also: Hellsley-Marlena-Sable, Nasty Boys, Flash Funk, Taz, Rick Steiner.

May 1997: Giant vs. Hogan: "Hey, Little Man, What Ya Gonna Do?" Also: Woman-Benoit-Sullivan, Shawn-Bret, Undertaker, Scott Hall, Sabu.

June 1997: Ahmed Johnson Reveals: "I Almost Joined The Nation Of Domination." Plus: Mankind, Lex Luger, NWO, Davey Boy Smith, Jerry Graham.

July 1997 (Special Issue): House Of Horrors! Fourth World Title Change In '97 ... Can The Undertaker Restore Order? Plus: Stars answer personal questions, Steve McMichael, Road Warriors, Syxx, Sandman-Lori-Tyler.

August 1997: Bret Hart Lashes Out: "You're All Responsible For What I'm About To Do!" Plus: Shawn Michaels, Chyna, Steiners, Sting, Gilbert tourney.

September 1997: The NWO's Anniversary Report. Plus: Lex Luger, Shawn-Bret, Terry Funk, Rob Van Dam, Ken Shamrock.

October 1997 (Special Issue): WCW Midyear Report. Plus: LOD-PG-13, Rob Van Dam, Flair & Horsemen, Ken Shamrock, McMichael-White, Madd & Mama Maxxine.

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INSIDE WRESTLING

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HOW MUCH LONGER WILL THE FANS FOLLOW TOMMY RICH?

Dear Editor:

I've always been Tommy Rich's biggest fan. My friends and I go to all his matches in Atlanta. We have met him a couple of times after the matches and he has always been very nice to us. He is a good person.

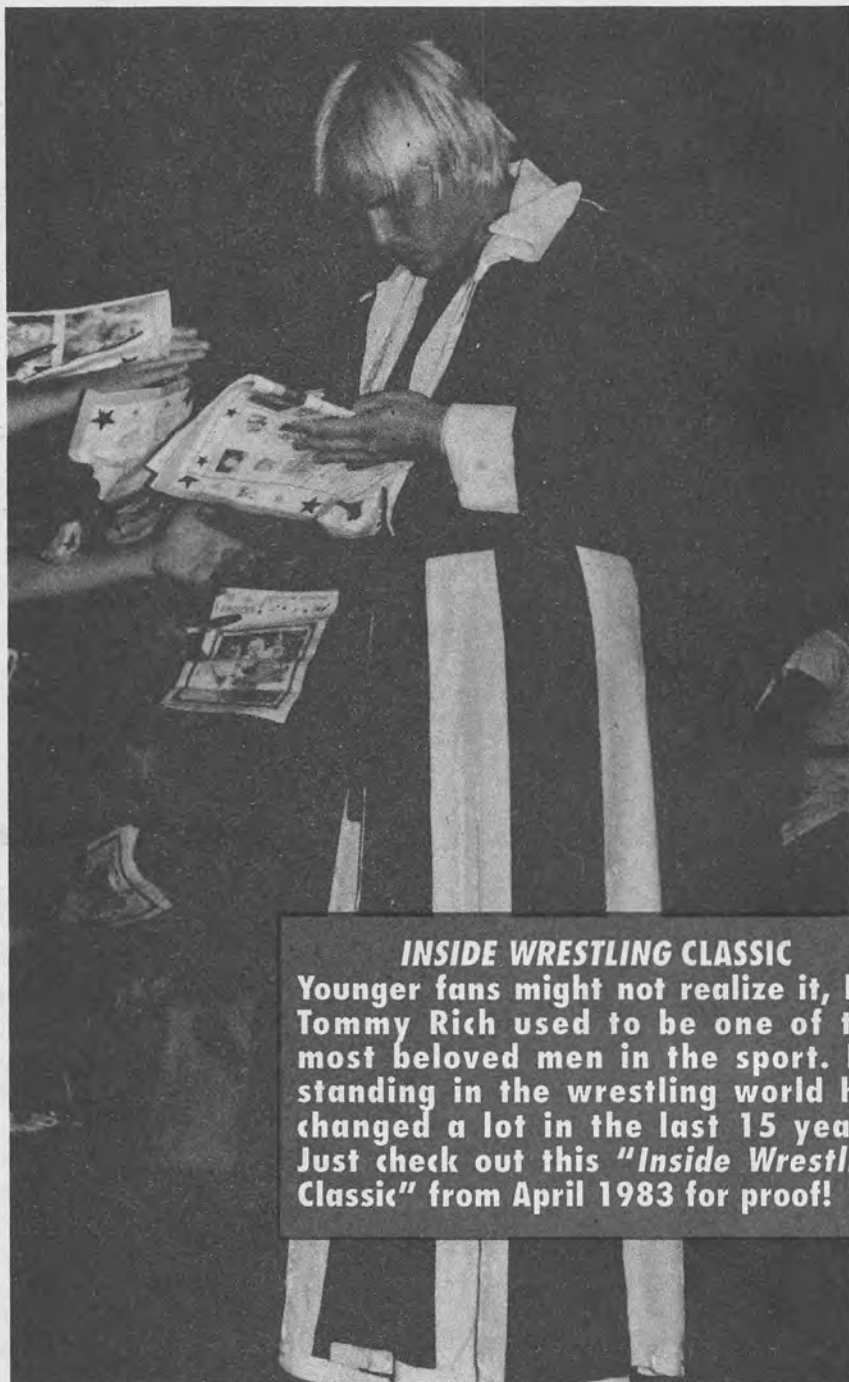
Lately, however, I've been worried about the direction Tommy's career is taking. He doesn't seem to care about winning the NWA title back. In fact, he doesn't seem to care about winning any titles. He keeps getting involved in these feuds with Ivan Koloff, Buzz Sawyer, The Iron Sheik . . . the names don't even matter. It's just one bloody feud after another.

I guess what I want to know is why Tommy has given up on trying to get a title shot. He's obviously one of the top wrestlers in the nation, and worthy of a chance at any of the champions. Maybe if he reads this, he'll realize what he's been doing.

Until then, I will continue to root him on to victory, but I truly hope he can straighten himself out.

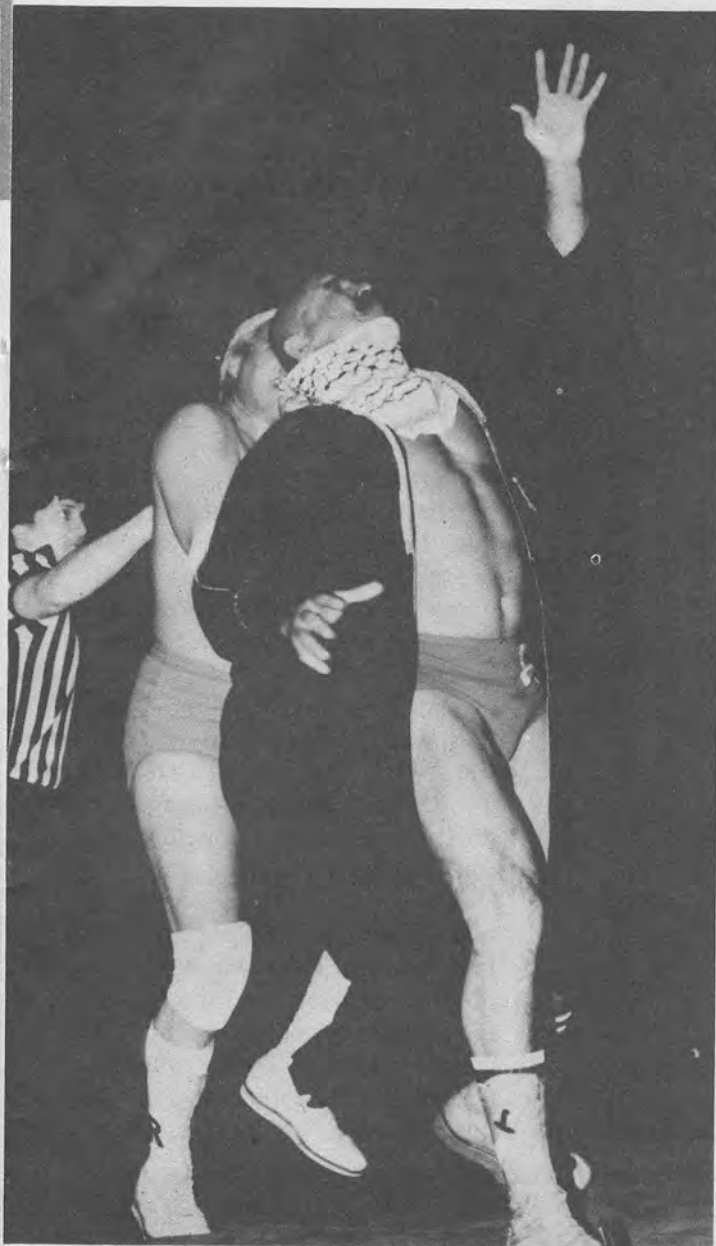
DEBBIE PELLMAN
Atlanta, GA

THIS IS JUST one of the many letters received at the offices of *Inside Wrestling* from perceptive fans concerned with the direction Tommy Rich's career has taken in recent months. From Sawyer to Koloff to the Iron Sheik, Rich has jumped from one feud to another with seemingly no regard for getting a shot at Ric Flair's NWA

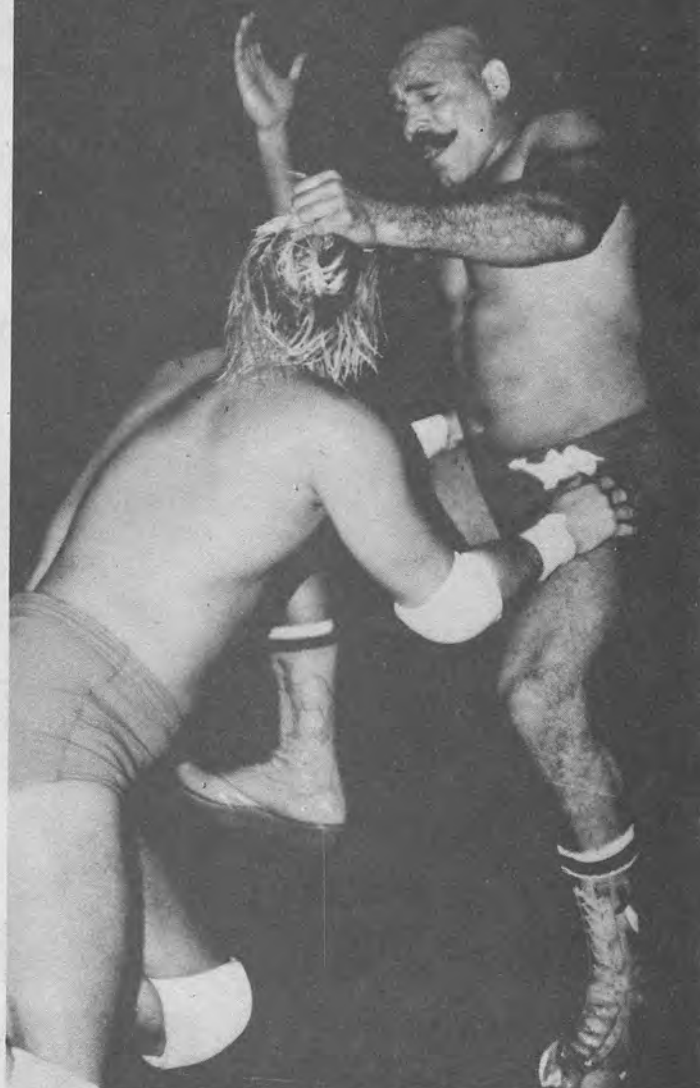


INSIDE WRESTLING CLASSIC

Younger fans might not realize it, but Tommy Rich used to be one of the most beloved men in the sport. His standing in the wrestling world has changed a lot in the last 15 years. Just check out this "Inside Wrestling Classic" from April 1983 for proof!



Feuds with such men as Hussein "Iron Sheik" Arab have gotten in the way of Tommy Rich's career goals.



championship or any other title for that matter. Rich's fans would like nothing more than to see a belt around his waist, but they say he has lost sight of his goals. They say his obsession with ridding the Georgia area of its rulebreakers is hurting his career—badly.

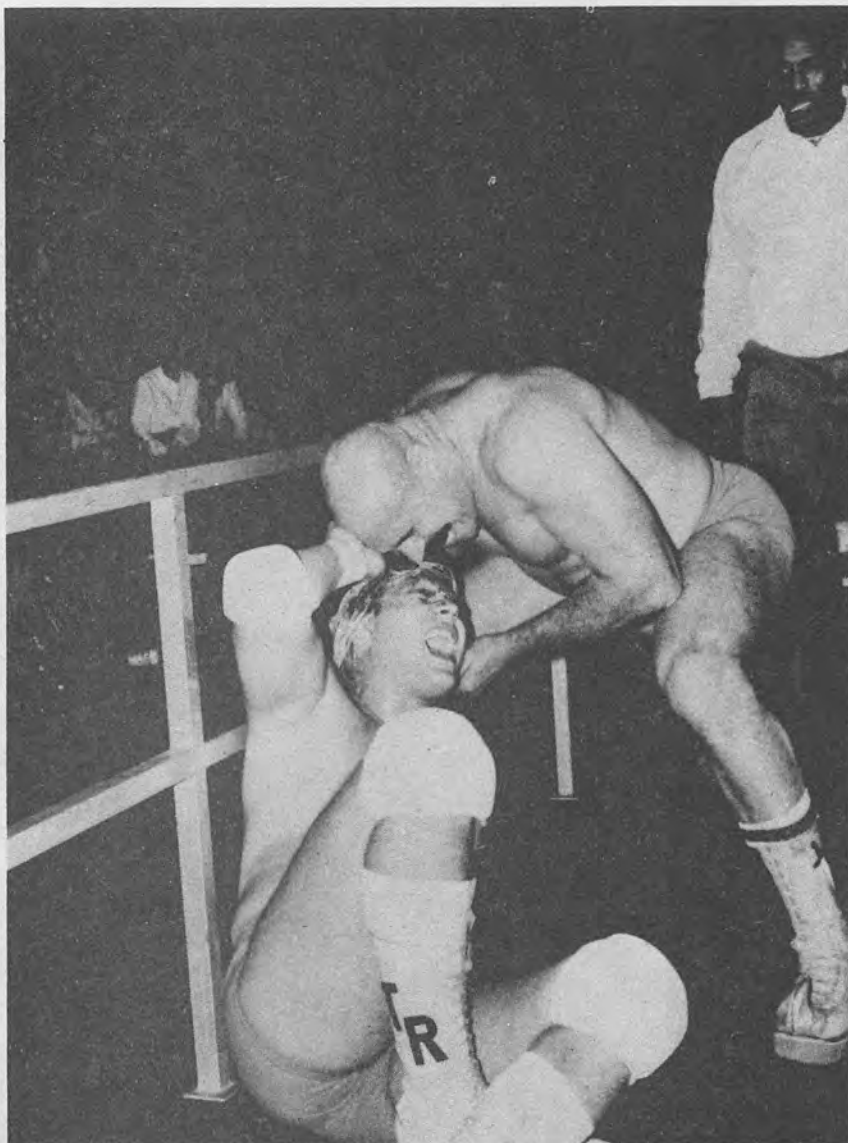
"When I was a little boy," Rich said in a recent interview, "there

was a big kid in my class who used to take everybody's lunch money. He got away with it because he was so much bigger than the rest of us. I used to get around giving him mine by hiding my money in my sock, but I always said I would get him back some day. That day came years later in high school. We were playing basketball in gym class,

and the gym teacher had to leave for a while. We kept on playing, and when we were both going for a rebound, I elbowed him right in the gut. He went down like a sack of potatoes. It didn't get anyone's lunch money back, but it made me happy.

"I guess it's hard for me to let go of a grudge," he continued. "It gets

Has Tommy Rich lost sight of his goals? Many of his fans are concerned that Rich has ceased his quest to regain the NWA title and is instead diving blindly into bitter feuds with Georgia rulebreakers



Arab goes after Rich, teeth first (above). Koloff holds Tommy in place by his throat as Mad Dog Buzz Sawyer and Iron Sheik move in to assist (right). Rich is more concerned these days with defending Georgia wrestling than with furthering his own career.

me mad when a guy like Sawyer or Koloff hurts someone. Sawyer doesn't just hurt people, he humiliates them. I don't care for that at all. I sit there and burn up inside when I see him rub a guy's face into the mat. A wrestler should go into the ring to win. There's no place for the tactics Sawyer uses in the ring.

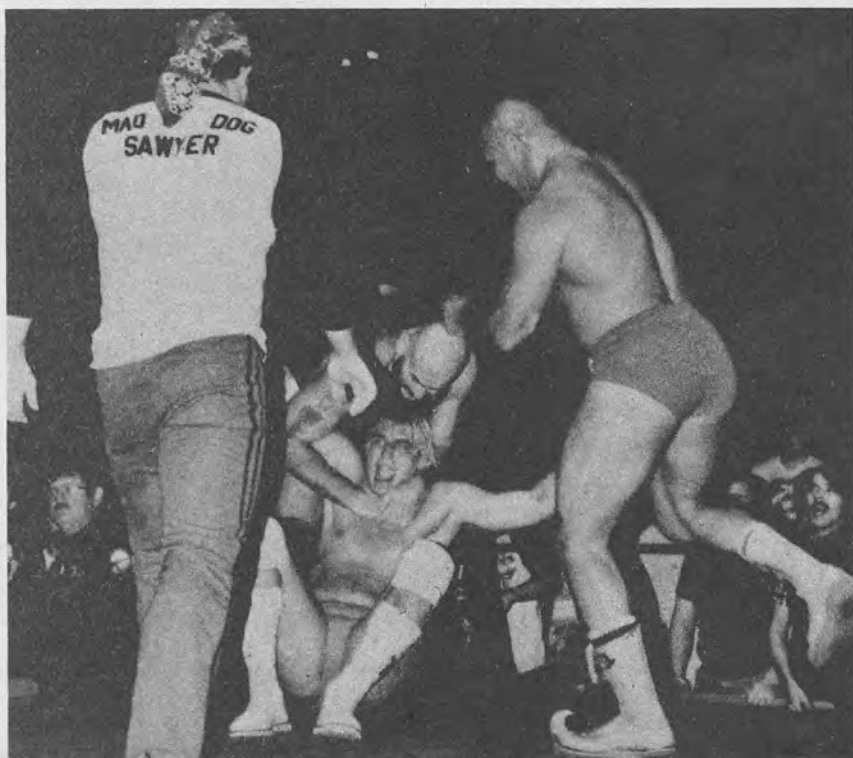
"It upsets me when I hear that the fans are worried, because they are very important to me. In some matches, the fans can mean the

difference between winning and losing. I hear them cheering me on, and I know I have to win for them. But there are also some things I have to do for myself and my sport. I wouldn't be any good to anyone if I kept all that anger locked up inside. It would affect my performance in the ring, and it would affect my life outside the ring. Wrestling isn't one of those careers where you can leave your work at the office."

Many fans feel that Rich's current string of feuds is affecting his ring activity. One fan observed that the type of wrestlers Rich is seeing day after day has necessitated a change in his style; he isn't as good a scientific wrestler as he once was.

Another fan wrote a letter saying Rich was getting too beat up in the ring. This fan feared that the injuries Rich was suffering against the rulebreakers would, in the long run, shorten his career.

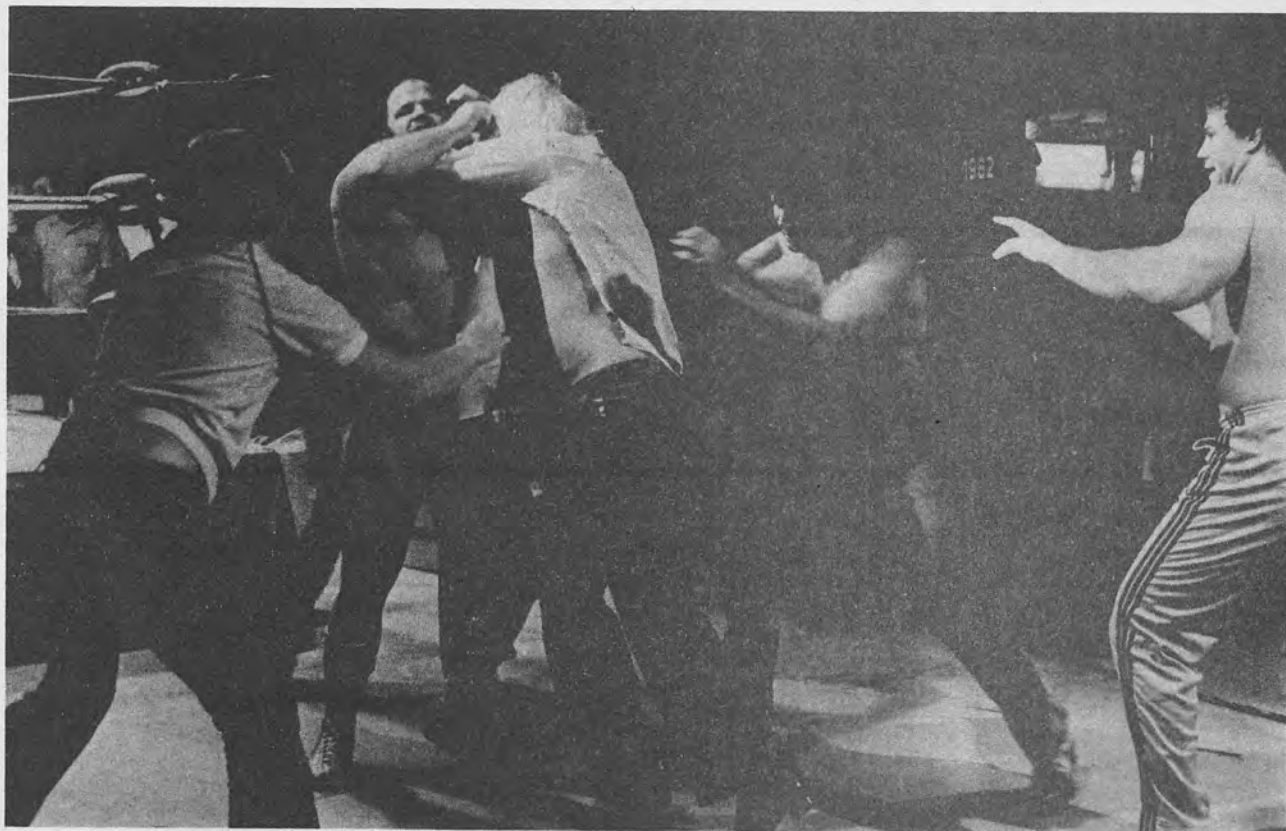
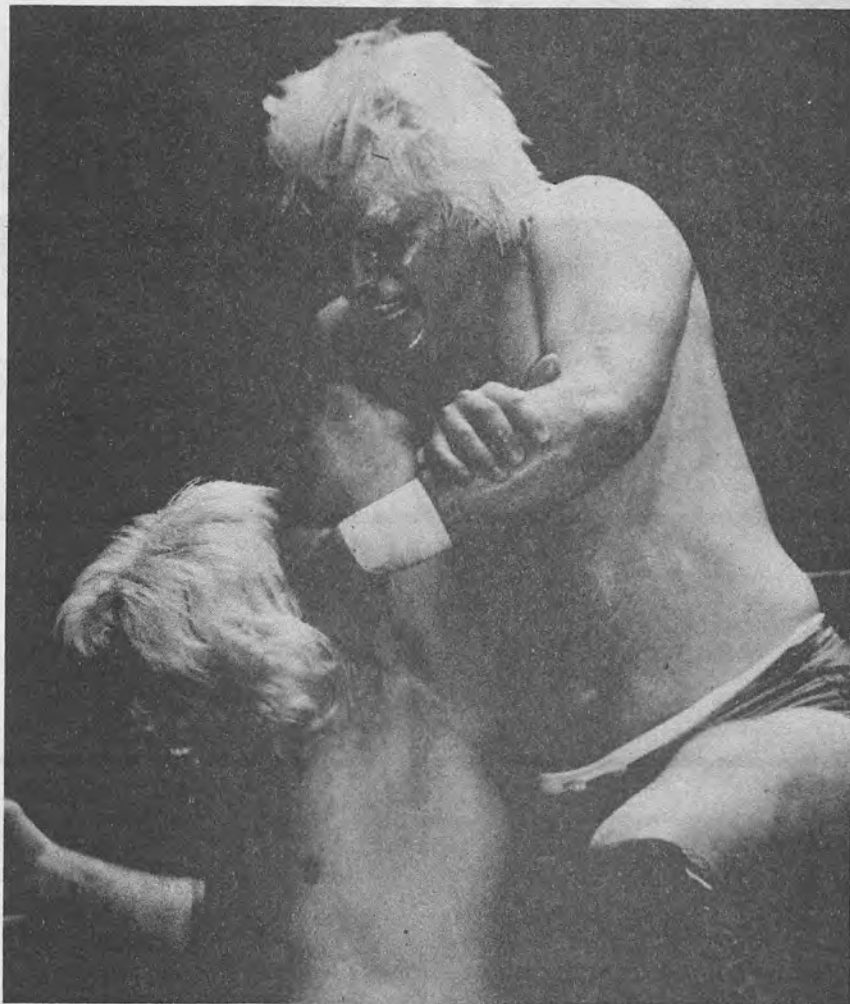
"I worry about that, too," Rich said. "These guys fight dirty, and they're tough. Let's face it, there's no place in wrestling for some of the tricks they pull in the ring, but when you're in there with a brawler, you've gotta brawl. If you don't, you're in trouble, man.



Imagine if I tried to wrestle Koloff by the rules. I'd be destroyed. You've gotta keep your guard up against these guys.

"I'd love to have the title back. Every wrestler's goal is to be world champion. For the short time I held the belt, I was on cloud nine. There's no better feeling in the world. I'll get a shot at Flair. Maybe I should just wait a while. Being champion takes a lot out of you. He'll be ready to give it up in a while, and I'll be there ready to relieve him of it. But for now, there are some things I've gotta take care of at home. I don't like what I see going on here, and I have to do something about it. That's the kind of person I am. I hope the fans understand that and continue to stand behind me. Like with that kid in school, it might take a while, but I'll get the job done." □

Rather than focus his energies at getting another title shot with Ric Flair (right) and have a chance to regain the NWA championship, Rich has become embroiled in a series of feuds. Wearing his street clothes, Tommy charges at his primary rival, Buzz Sawyer (below).



OFFICIAL RATINGS

TOP 15

1—STING

(-) WCW World champion

2—SHAWN MICHAELS

(1) WWF World champion

3—DIAMOND DALLAS PAGE

(4) U.S. heavyweight champion

4—OWEN HART

(-) No. 2 contender: WWF World title

5—THE UNDERTAKER

(8) No. 3 contender: WWF World title

6—ULTIMO DRAGON

(-) WCW cruiserweight champion

7—KENSUKE SASAKI

(-) IWGP heavyweight champion

8—TAZ

(-) ECW TV champion

9—DUDE LOVE

(15) No. 5 contender: WWF World title

10—RIC FLAIR

(-) No. 6 contender: WCW World title

11—CURT HENNIG

(2) No. 7 contender: WCW World title

12—STEVE AUSTIN

(3) No. 4 contender: WWF World title

13—EDDY GUERRERO

(9) No. 9 contender: WCW World title

14—KEN SHAMROCK

(6) No. 7 contender: WWF World title

15—BILL GOLDBERG

(-) No. 8 contender: WCW World title

WCW

1—STING

(-) 260, Venice Beach, CA

2—DIAMOND DALLAS PAGE

(5) 260, Tampa, FL

3—HULK HOGAN

(1) 275, Venice Beach, CA

4—ULTIMO DRAGON

(-) 175, Mexico City, Mexico

5—LEX LUGER

(6) 265, Chicago, IL

6—BOOKER T

(-) 250, Harlem, NY

7—RIC FLAIR

(10) 243, Charlotte, NC

8—CURT HENNIG

(2) 235, Minneapolis, MN

9—BILL GOLDBERG

(-) 270, Tulsa, OK

10—EDDY GUERRERO

(3) 221, El Paso, TX

11—DEAN MALENKO

(12) 216, Tampa, FL

12—PERRY SATURN

(8) 234, Cleveland, OH

13—MARCUS BAGWELL

(-) 240, Marietta, GA

14—DISCO INFERNO

(4) 238, Brooklyn, NY

15—REY MISTERIO JR.

(13) 140, San Diego, CA

WWF

1—SHAWN MICHAELS

(1) 234, San Antonio, TX

2—ROCKY MAIVIA

(2) 272, Pearl City, HI

3—OWEN HART

(-) 227, Calgary, Alberta

4—THE UNDERTAKER

(6) 328, parts unknown

5—STEVE AUSTIN

(3) 241, Dallas, TX

6—DUDE LOVE

(8) 277, Truth or Consequences, NM

7—KANE

(7) 345, parts unknown

8—KEN SHAMROCK

(4) 235, San Bernardino, CA

9—HUNTER HEARST HELMSLEY

(9) 279, Greenwich, CT

10—TAKA MICHINOKU

(5) 169, Morioka, Japan

11—JEFF JARRETT

(11) 230, Nashville, TN

12—VADER

(10) 450, Denver, CO

13—MARC MERO

(13) 235, Buffalo, NY

14—GOLDUST

(14) 254, Austin, TX

15—FLASH FUNK

(-) 222, Denver, CO

ECW

1—SHANE DOUGLAS

(1) 240, Pittsburgh, PA

2—TAZ

(2) 248, Red Hook, NY

3—THE SANDMAN

(5) 244, Philadelphia, PA

4—SABU

(4) 225, Bombay

5—BAM BAM BIGELOW

(3) 368, Mt. Laurel, NJ

6—TOMMY DREAMER

(7) 245, Yonkers, NY

7—JERRY LYNN

(15) 214, Minneapolis, MN

8—ROB VAN DAM

(8) 240, Battle Creek, MI

9—CHRIS CANDIDO

(9) 226, Carteret, NJ

10—SUPER NOVA

(-) 215, Bricktown, NJ

11—JUSTIN CREDIBLE

(10) 225, Waterbury, CT

12—AL SNOW

(11) 232, Lima, OH

13—SPIKE DUDLEY

(13) 155, parts unknown

14—DOUG FURNAS

(-) 243, Commerce, OK

15—CHRIS CHETTI

(-) 227, Amityville, NY

INTERNATIONAL

1—KENSUKE SASAKI

(5) 233, Tokyo, Japan

2—MITSU HARU MISAWA

(1) 228, Ashikaga, Japan

3—SHINYA HASHIMOTO

(2) 287, Gifu, Japan

4—KONNAN

(14) 237, Mexico City, Mexico

5—TAKA MICHINOKU

(3) 169, Morioka, Japan

6—PERRO AGUAYO

(7) 215, Zacatecas, Mexico

7—KEIJI MUTO

(4) 245, Yamaguchi, Japan

8—GREAT SASUKE

(-) 212, Morioka, Japan

9—ATLANTIS

(-) 180, Guadalajara, Mexico

10—DUKE DROESE

(-) 306, Chicago, IL

11—MASATO TANAKA

(-) 235, Tokyo, Japan

12—FRANZ SCHUMANN

(-) 201, Graz, Austria

13—JUSHIN LIGER

(9) 206, Hiroshima, Japan

14—LA PARKA

(-) 235, Torreon, Mexico

15—GENICHIRO TENRYU

(-) 235, Fukui, Japan

TOP 15 TAG TEAMS

1—BILLY GUNN & JESSE JAMES

(1) WWF World tag team champions

2—RICK & SCOTT STEINER

(2) WCW World tag team champions

3—CHRIS CANDIDO & LANCE STORM

(4) ECW tag team champions

4—THE BLACKJACKS

(-) No. 1 contenders: WWF World tag title

5—MASA CHONO & KEIJI MUTO

(7) IWGP tag team champions

6—THE BARBARIAN & MENG

(9) No. 1 contenders: WCW World tag title

7—STEVE AUSTIN & DUDE LOVE

(-) No. 2 contenders: WWF World tag title

8—OWEN HART & KEN SHAMROCK

(-) No. 3 contenders: WWF World tag title

9—HARLEM HEAT

(5) No. 2 contenders: WCW World tag title

10—THE ROAD WARRIORS

(3) No. 4 contenders: WWF World tag title

11—FAAROOQ & ROCKY MAIVIA

(-) No. 5 contenders: WWF World tag title

12—HENRY & PHINEAS GODWINN

(12) No. 6 contenders: WWF World tag title

13—LITTLE GUIDO & TRACEY SMOTHERS

(13) No. 1 contenders: ECW tag title

14—THE HEADBANGERS

(11) No. 7 contenders: WWF World tag title

15—BUH BUH RAY & D-VON DUDLEY

(14) No. 2 contenders: ECW tag title

These ratings are compiled by the editors with the assistance of promoters, wrestlers, and reporters around the country, and are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and the inherent skill of each wrestler. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (-) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue ... Championships highlighted in bold on the "Roll Call Of Champions" have changed hands since our previous issue ... The information under the championship listing indicates the date that champion won the title, who the former champion was, and where the match took place.

For period ended January 4, 1998

ROLL CALL OF CHAMPIONS

ALL-JAPAN INTERNATIONAL CHAMPION:

MITSU HARU MISAWA

(January 20, 1997; from Kenta Kobashi; Osaka, Japan)

ALL-JAPAN INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:

JOHNNY ACE & KENTA KOBASHI

(October 4, 1997; from Gary Albright & Steve Williams; Nagoya, Japan)

ALL-JAPAN UNITED NATIONAL CHAMPION:

MITSU HARU MISAWA

(January 20, 1997; from Kenta Kobashi; Osaka, Japan)

AMERICAN INDEPENDENT WRESTLING FEDERATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION:

CYCLONE

(October 18, 1997; from Major Havoc; Elkin, NC)

AMERICAN INDEPENDENT WRESTLING FEDERATION U.S. CHAMPION:

JOHNNY REB

(January 3, 1998; from Brian Danzig; Elkin, NC)

AMERICAN INDEPENDENT WRESTLING FEDERATION TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:

IRON HORSE & E.Z. RYDER

(October 18, 1997; from Don Carson & Rick Deeze; Elkin, NC)

CENTURY WRESTLING ALLIANCE HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: TITLE VACANT

(Most recently held by Kevin Sullivan)

CENTURY WRESTLING ALLIANCE CRUISERWEIGHT CHAMPION:

MILLENNIUM

(October 18, 1997; from Joel Davis; Lawrence, MA)

ECW HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: SHANE DOUGLAS

(November 30, 1997; from Bam Bam Bigelow; Monaca, PA)

ECW TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: CHRIS CANDIDO & LANCE STORM

(December 6, 1997; from Doug Furnas & Phil Lafon; Philadelphia, PA)

ECW TELEVISION CHAMPION: TAZ

(June 7, 1997; from Shane Douglas; Philadelphia, PA)

INT'L PRO WRESTLING HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: KING KONG BUNDY

(December 5, 1997; from Brick Bronsky; Jim Thorpe, PA)

IWGP HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: KENSUKE SASAKI

(August 31, 1997; from Shinya Hashimoto; Yokohama, Japan)

IWGP INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:

MASA CHONO & KEIJI MUTO

(October 19, 1997; from Kensuke Sasaki & Kazuo Yamazaki; Kobe, Japan)

MID-EASTERN WRESTLING FEDERATION HEAVYWEIGHT TITLE:

SALVATORE SINCERE

(November 18, 1997; from Corporal Punishment; Keyser, WV)

MID-EASTERN WRESTLING FEDERATION LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION:

QUINN NASH

(November 15, 1997; beat Adam Flash & Mark Schrader in three-way match; Hampstead, MD)

MUSIC CITY WRESTLING NORTH AMERICAN CHAMPION: TERRY GOLDEN

(November 27, 1997; from Colorado Kid; Nashville, TN)

MUSIC CITY WRESTLING TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:

SHANE EDEN & THRILLBILLY

(November 27, 1997; from The Centerfolds; Nashville, TN)

PACIFIC WRESTLING FEDERATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION:

MITSU HARU MISAWA

(January 20, 1997; from Kenta Kobashi; Osaka, Japan)

PACIFIC WRESTLING FEDERATION JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION:

MAUNUKEA MOSSMAN

(August 22, 1997; from Yoshinari Ogawa; Tokyo, Japan)

PACIFIC WRESTLING FEDERATION TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:

JOHNNY ACE & KENTA KOBASHI

(October 4, 1997; from Gary Albright & Steve Williams; Nagoya, Japan)

PENNSYLVANIA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION:

TIGER KHAN

(November 21, 1997; from Cheetah Master; Reading, PA)

PENNSYLVANIA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION:

RECKLESS YOUTH

(November 21, 1997; from Mike Quackenbush; Reading, PA)

PENNSYLVANIA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:

COL. JIHAD HUSSEIN & DAVE PATERA

(September 26, 1997; from Mike Quackenbush & Pat Shamrock; Reading, PA)

PRO WRESTLING FEDERATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: RIPPER

(December 6, 1997; from Italian Stallion; Kings Mountain, NC)

PRO WRESTLING FEDERATION JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION:

CRUEL CONNECTION II

(December 12, 1997; from Madd Maxxine; Jefferson, NC)

PRO WRESTLING FEDERATION TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:

GEORGE SOUTH & ITALIAN STALLION

(December 6, 1997; from Chris Hamrick & Ripper; Kings Mountain, NC)

WCW CRUISERWEIGHT CHAMPION: ULTIMO DRAGON

(December 29, 1997; from Eddy Guerrero; Baltimore, MD)

WCW TELEVISION CHAMPION: BOOKER T

(December 29, 1997; from Disco Inferno; Baltimore, MD)

WCW U.S. CHAMPION: DALLAS PAGE

(December 28, 1997; from Curt Hennig; Washington, D.C.)

WCW WORLD CHAMPION: STING

(December 28, 1997; from Hulk Hogan; Washington, D.C.)

WCW WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: RICK & SCOTT STEINER

(October 13, 1997; from Scott Hall & Syxx; Tampa, FL)

WWF EUROPEAN CHAMPION: HUNTER HEARST HELMSLEY

(December 11, 1997; from Shawn Michaels; Lowell, MA)

WWF INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPION: ROCKY MAIVIA

(December 8, 1997; by forfeit from Steve Austin; Portland, ME)

WWF LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: TAKA MICHINOKU

(December 7, 1997; beat Brian Christopher in tournament final; Springfield, MA)

WWF WORLD CHAMPION: SHAWN MICHAELS

(November 9, 1997; from Bret Hart; Montreal, Quebec)

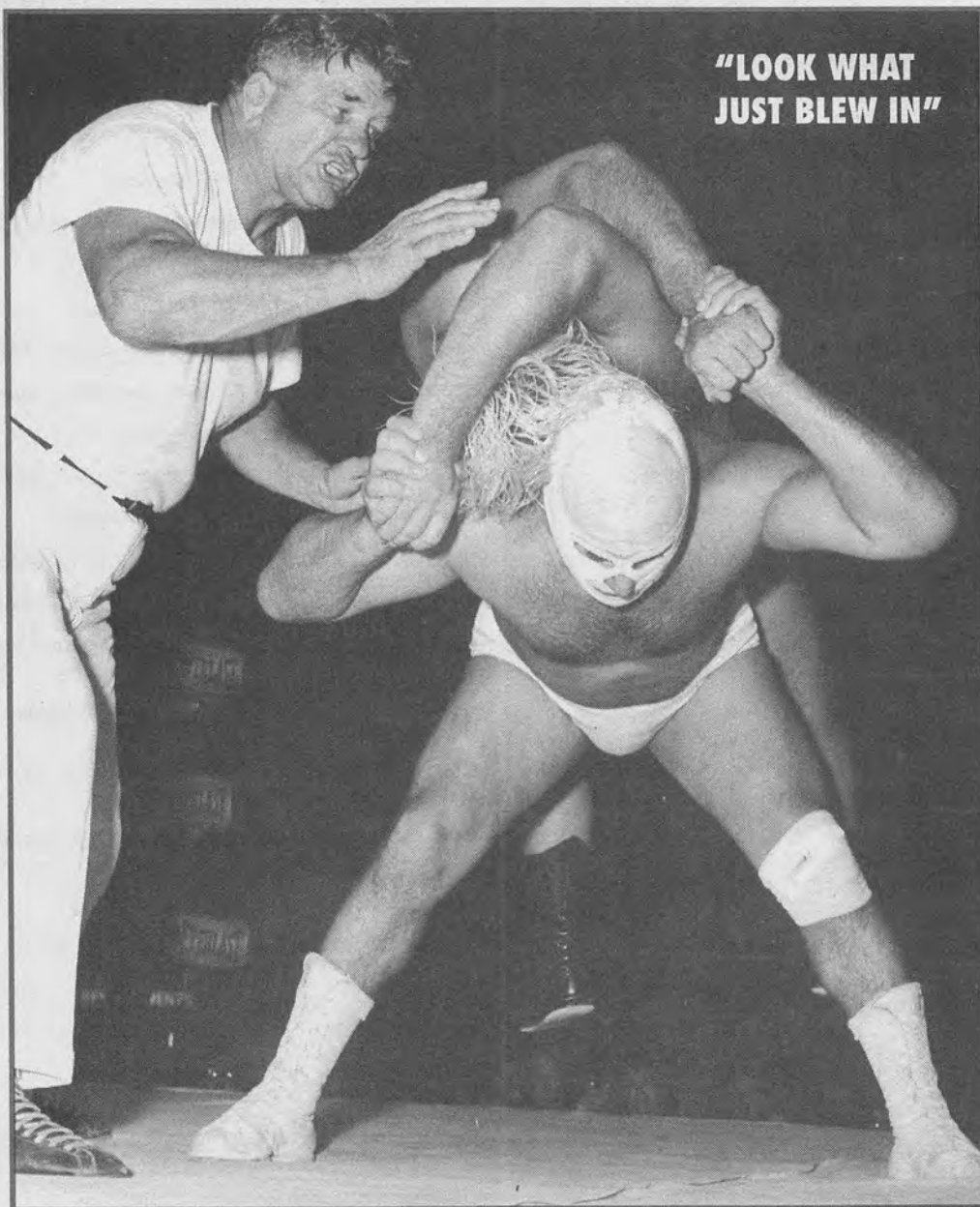
WWF WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:

BILLY GUNN & JESSE JAMES

(November 24, 1997; from The Road Warriors; Fayetteville, NC)

BLAST FROM THE PAST

This Month In Wrestling History

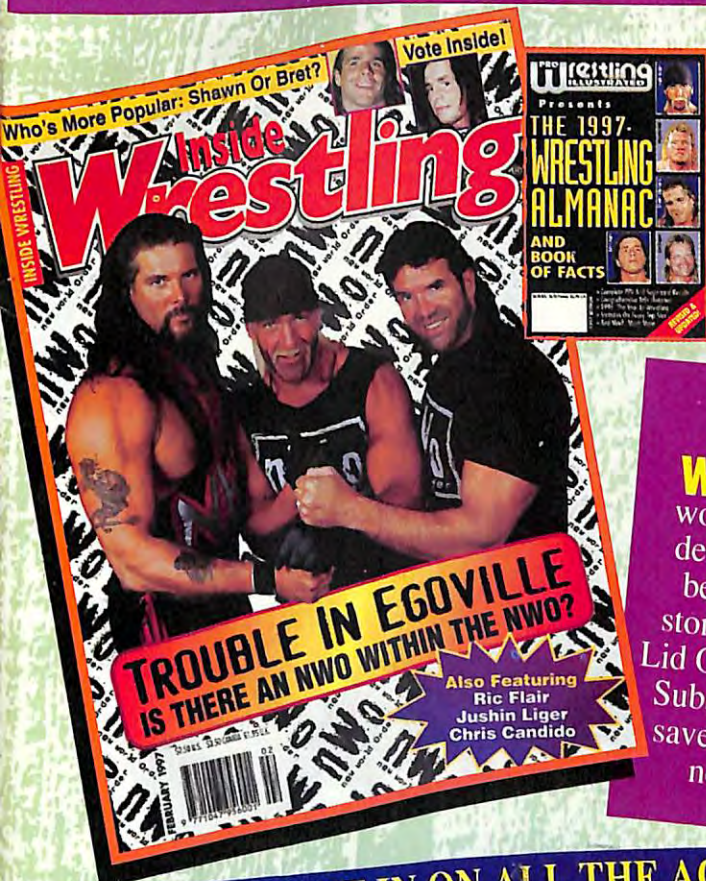


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Computer Tournament '98

ACTION CLOSEUP

It's almost time to panic for Shawn Michaels when Bret Hart starts to wrap him up in that "sharpshooter" of his. But then we all remember what happened the last time Shawn locked Bret in the "sharpshooter." That was one ugly night in Montreal last November. In any case, when Bret gets this painful hold cinched on tight in the middle of the ring, it's tough to counter. And since there is no outside interference permitted in our tournament ... well, Shawn, sorry, but it just wasn't your computer year.

